

# Shelton Democratic Party Platform 2021

“The Change We Need. The Team You Deserve.”

## Preamble

Shelton Democrats are committed to maintaining a low tax rate so all residents, including our seniors, retirees and middle-class families can afford to live here. We can maintain low taxes while making quality of life improvements and strategic investments to support our schools, public safety, and our businesses. This will be achieved through sound management, collaboration, and accountability. However, most importantly, we will accomplish this transparently. The people of Shelton deserve to know how their money is being spent.

Imagine a well-planned and thriving downtown of restaurants, arts, and open spaces with sufficient parking to support both residents and visitors. A place where people want to visit. Imagine leaders working together to evaluate the city's needs to unleash new opportunities for the city to grow, prosper, and attract new residents and businesses. This future of Shelton is possible with your Democratic Team.

## Sound Management and Transparency

### 2019-2021 Accomplishments

- Our Democratic team defeated the mayor's power grab of a Charter Revision which would have consolidated all power within his office and eliminate necessary checks and balances.
- We advocated for transparency and change considering the city's failure to provide reliable transportation to every Shelton student. The Democratic Town **Committee (DTC)** issued a Freedom of **Information Act (FOIA)** request to determine the true operating costs of the school bus system.
- Democratic Board of Apportionment and Taxation members uncovered many mistakes in budgets for the past two fiscal years for which Republicans and the mayor had no answers and failed to correct.

### Goals and Objectives

- The current budget process is both flawed and mismanaged. The process is not continuous and does not have the ability to control spending, monitor performance and results of all boards and departments in meeting their objectives. An ongoing transparent oversight process that requires a formal Finance Board is needed.
- The budget process needs to be flexible year-to-year to move available resources in line with changing needs of the city for infrastructure, services, and education as well as vital services such as fire and police.
- Shelton's Board of Apportionment and Taxation must be allowed to operate as a true Board of Finance to execute this process. They should have full authority to manage and *monitor* the budget for the entire fiscal year as required by Shelton's charter. The Board of Apportionment and Taxation provides separation of power, checks and balances, and basic accounting controls with the ability to request operational audits. The current administration's efforts to centralize this function with the Board of Aldermen will only make for less transparency and accountability to the citizens.

- At the core of the budget mismanagement is the way the city handles excess funds. The city overstates the budget, then restrains spending to create an artificial surplus. The unexplained surplus is added to the next fiscal year budget to be spent outside the normal rules and transparency that would be in place if the city had a formal rainy-day fund (also called a reserve fund or budget stabilization fund). And just a few years ago Lauretti and the Republican Aldermen spent a \$12 to \$14 million surplus like this without explanation or any public accountability. This practice is out of step with other cities and must be stopped and replaced by formal policies that dictate how the reserve is funded and how it can be spent. The reserve should be separately budgeted and accounted for publicly to improve transparency.
- Given the way the current budget is purposely overstated it makes it impossible to measure departmental performance and to motivate and reward employees for their cost savings and productivity improvements. The city must measure the quality and cost effectiveness and outcomes of the services it delivers. Without these, citizens have no confidence that public funds are being spent wisely. Every board and department must be held publicly accountable for achieving their goals and objectives.
- The code of ethics is a key component of the city's transparency, but Shelton's is both structurally deficient and out of date. The language of the code is both confusing and structured to discourage citizens from reporting ethics violations.
- The Board of Ethics should have the power to oversee and ensure that all elected officials (including the Mayor and Board of Aldermen) and employees conduct the city's business honestly and needs to be independent of both the aldermen and the mayor. Currently Shelton's Board of Ethics is appointed by the Board of Aldermen and the mayor who tried to take that power in last year's charter revision. A new appointment process is needed.

## **Low Taxes and Strategic Investment**

### **2019-2021 Accomplishments**

- Democratic Board of Apportionment and Taxation members offered two alternative budget plans that would have balanced the budget without increasing taxes while fully funding contractual obligations for the Board of Education.
- DTC members volunteered time and resources to advocating for better city planning and opposing unnecessarily large development plans that are outside of an area's normal zoning
- The Shelton Democrats acknowledge that a parking problem exists downtown that is frustrating residents and businesses, while the mayor and Republicans deny the reality of the situation

### **Goals and Objectives**

- Strategic goals and priorities for the city should be identified in the budget document for the city, not simply line items, as we outlined in the sound management section.
- To assure the ability to maintain a low tax rate, the city budget should be structurally balanced.
  - Non-recurring revenues and resources, such as the sale of city property, building permit fees, early retirement savings, and surplus funds from previous years, should not be relied on to cover ongoing expenditures. These are not sustainable actions.
  - Non-recurring revenue should instead be allocated towards capital projects identified in the budget.
  - The city should also utilize "stretch goals." "Stretch goals" is a budget term that means department budgets should be set to motivate more productivity and lower cost. Today there is no goal for such improvements. The city overstates the budget and then

requires the departments to spend less. This is very misleading as it is impossible to see if any improvement or cost savings have been realized.

- Planning and Zoning and the Shelton Economic Development Corporation should collaborate on solving the parking problem downtown. A comprehensive solution would involve not just construction of more parking, but also strategies to make better use of it, improvements to pedestrian and bike paths, and a plan to improve access to public transportation both intra and inter-city.

## **Smart Economic Development**

### **2019-2021 Accomplishments**

- Democratic Planning and Zoning Commissioners continued working in a bipartisan fashion with their counterparts while opposing ill-advised overdevelopment.
- Commissioners emphasized the importance of maintaining light industry on Bridgeport Avenue instead of high-density residential development that would increase the traffic burden in the area.
- Democratic elected officials supported the plan to ease regulations on small businesses and restaurants looking to create or expand outdoor dining areas during the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **Goals and Objectives**

- Our downtown area can be a regional center of commerce with popular restaurants, shopping, entertainment, and socializing. This starts by providing parking options to support our downtown businesses and to attract both Shelton residents and visitors to our city to enjoy the benefits of the downtown area.
- Our party will seek input from the business community to better understand their needs as the city develops, particularly around the needs for infrastructure improvements to our major roadways and commerce centers.
- Our elected candidates will work to develop relationships with the State of Connecticut and the Naugatuck Valley Council of Governments (NVCOG) to develop an infrastructure plan to address our current traffic issues and promote the growth of Shelton as an essential industrial and commercial hub of the state of Connecticut.
- The Planning and Zoning commission should update the Plan of Conservation and Development to address in more detail where and how higher density residential development should happen and the needed expansion of city services to support them.

## **Supporting First Responders and Community Efforts**

### **2019-2021 Accomplishments**

- The DTC passed a resolution in support of the Shelton Police Union in its labor disagreement with Mayor Lauretti's Administration.
- Shelton Democrats formed a citywide bipartisan task force focused on Racial Awareness and Cultural Education (RACE) which has expanded to include members of other organizations including the Historical Society, Team Inc., the Board of Education, and the NAACP. The newly formed RACE committee operates independent from the party.

### **Goals and Objectives**

- We recognize Shelton's growth is changing its demographic profile. We must meet the needs of a growing number of seniors, a wider range of family incomes, and a younger more ethnically

diverse generation by reviewing city investments in social services and developing a fuller spectrum that is equivalent to neighboring towns.

- Support our police; The grievances between the Shelton Police Union and City Hall must be resolved so officers can return to the duty of protecting our citizens.
- As Shelton continues to become more multicultural, with our school system enrolling English as a second language students with as many as 40 or more different first languages spoken, our law enforcement needs to be proactive in building the skills to engage with a more diverse community and keep all our friends and neighbors safe. There are no problems with racial bias in our police department that we are aware of, but we still encourage and will promote development of a police diversity training program to develop cultural competency in our police force.
- As downtown redevelops, the city should consider the need to create a new downtown police substation to develop a community presence.
- Parks should be welcoming – better maintained, with features and programs that visitors and citizens can enjoy.
- Our civic buildings – libraries, community and senior centers, fire stations, the city hall – can be more fully functional, better maintained, and objects of pride.
- We believe in maintaining the character of our communities and respecting zoning in residential neighborhoods but also address any systemic issues that lead to housing segregation and racial exclusion with solutions created at the city level.
- The City of Shelton must uphold a vision for the city's future which is consistent with the Plan of Conservation and Development. Residential high-density development can be appropriate, but in select areas of our city such as our downtown.
- Affordable housing must be included in any new development plans to be compliant with state law. This will allow the city to maintain better control of our residential planning while increasing residential diversity in responsible ways and make the city more affordable for seniors, retirees, and the middle class.
- We will continue to be a sponsor of the RACE task force to maintain their independent efforts to address implicit bias and to develop racial and cultural awareness in Shelton

## **Quality Education**

### **2019-2021 Accomplishments**

- Our Democratic elected officials proposed solutions to increase the quality of education in our schools without increasing taxes.
- Democratic Board of Education members participated on the search committee including two rounds of interviews to hire the permanent superintendent. The new Superintendent is also the candidate our members advocated to appoint as the interim superintendent but were outvoted by the Republicans on the board.
- DTC BOE members worked with full Board to mitigate this year's budget underfunding by the Board of Aldermen so that there were no layoffs for the 2021- 2022 school year.
- DTC BOE members advocated against elimination of the Athletic Director position and managed to get it restored to full time for the remainder of the school year, 2020- 2021.

### **Goals and Objectives**

The City of Shelton must compete with Monroe, Trumbull, and Newtown for economic growth. When people are moving to the area, the number one issue is the strength of the school system. Currently Shelton ranks behind these towns. While the Shelton School district has made great gains in scholastic achievements in recent years, the Shelton Democratic Party is committed to improving our school's ranking with regards to other Fairfield County communities.

- The number one way to become more competitive is to stop the systemic underfunding of the school system caused by a flawed budget process (Shelton's per pupil expenditure is among the lowest in the state) and a contentious relationship between the school system and the city.
- Simply put, the current process does not work and must *change*. A more collaborative strategic process that recognizes the roles, responsibilities, and relationship between the Superintendent of Schools, the Board of Education, and the Board of Aldermen is needed. Since the BOA has the final say in school funding, they should be brought into the budget process as a partner and share budget responsibility and student achievement goals.
- The first step begins with a strategic assessment of the current state of academic performance and to jointly determine objectives and instructional priorities. Success can only be achieved when there is equity in both outcomes and resources for all students. The budget must provide information on how resources are used to achieve academic results.
- Next, the instructional priorities of the school system need to be thoroughly quantified and agreed with by the Board of Aldermen. Tradeoffs need to be weighed to examine whether the costs, financial or otherwise, of implementing an instructional priority are viable and assess how student performance is affected when funding is not adequate. This requires new levels of communication to build confidence among all education stakeholders. Open discussion is needed to make choices among various programs competing for available resources.
- This process entails identifying areas where the schools need to improve and finding the resources – financial, professional, technological – to improve educational outcomes so that citizens of Shelton can be proud of the achievements of our students. We want to see that graduation rates, the uses of technology, testing performance, and participation in extracurricular activities are among the best in the state.
- A separate strategic technology plan should be developed that addresses the numerous hardware and software issues encountered when teachers had to shift education to an online-based model during the Covid-19 pandemic.
- The Shelton Democratic Party is committed to putting forth candidates for all city positions who will work to improve the Shelton School System's performance - targeting an achievement of 85% of possible points in the Connecticut State Department of Education Next Generation Accountability System.
- Working together, the Superintendent and BOE should provide a culturally competent curriculum including meeting or exceeding the requirements of public act no. 19-12 (passed in 2019) requiring elective courses at the high school level that provides students with a better understanding of the African American, Black, Puerto Rican, and Latino contributions to United States history, society, economy, and culture.
- The school system must recognize the 21st century workforce demand for skilled tradespeople and students diverse career aspirations. Improving the quality of Shelton's schools will help graduates qualify for admission to a broader range of quality post-secondary schools, placement at vocational high schools and trade school programs, and a stronger sense of pride in the Shelton community.
- Surrounding towns with better school system ratings also enjoy higher property values. With the above changes Shelton will become more competitive and continue to enjoy economic growth.