

Ira Kaplan (D), Board of Finance, Candidate Bio and Statement



Candidate Bio

I am Ira Kaplan and I am asking for your vote for Easton's Board of Finance. My wife, Susan, and I moved here in 1999 with our two young children. Jason and Amy went through our public schools and graduated from Joel Barlow High School. My wife taught at Samuel Staples Elementary School and Helen Keller Middle School, and was HKMS principal for 10 years until her retirement this summer. I've worked as an actuary at General Reinsurance since 1992, where I am a senior vice president and pricing manager. I serve on the Region 9 Pension Committee and since March have been on the Board of Finance.

My wife and I met in ninth grade and have been a couple ever since. We grew up in Brooklyn N.Y., married in 1985, and shortly after moved to Poughkeepsie N.Y., living there 11 years before moving to Easton in 1999.

I've had various interests outside politics. I initiated election reform for my actuarial society; I served on the Board at the Rodeph Sholom Synagogue 15 years (and was Vice President); I volunteered 12 years to shave my head as a St. Baldrick's participant, raising \$60,000.

It was an honor to support my wife during her time as teacher and school leader. For years I felt that was my contribution to the betterment of Easton. But in recent years, I wanted to get my own hands dirty and do more.

I've never been an orthodox Democrat. I don't believe one party has a monopoly on good ideas. I'm happy to debate different political views. Sometimes I convince them, sometimes they convince me, sometimes no one is convinced, but we understand each other better. That's what I want our public discourse to be like — open, honest, factual, respectful.

Candidate Statement

For many years the Board of Finance has been split with four Republicans and two Democrats, and consistently the Republicans have sought to cut the education budget while the Democrats have consistently supported the budget — the budget, mind you, created by a 3-3 bipartisan Board of Education. (In 2019 one of the members called for a \$1,000,000 cut to the budget.) The Republican BOF Chair would threaten the voters that, if they voted against the budget, then (as though voters were bad children deserving punishment) the next budget would cut Education even more.

If we want to protect our investments in the value of our homes, we have to protect our town's attractiveness, its services, and its schools. Protecting the schools means protecting the students and protecting ourselves. There is a reason Easton doesn't fund extra curricular activities, and that neighboring towns have programs we lack. I do not support blindly accepting the BOE proposals, but I do not accept arbitrarily cutting it either.

The budgets should better reflect what the town wants rather than what these four Republicans want. How can we make that happen? One step: vote for Democrats this year, and we can achieve a 3-3 split on the BOF, and more successfully defend against cuts that go too far. Another: routine use of Advisory Questions that supplement the

Budget referendum, so that (a) we can say whether to move up or down if the budget does not pass, and (b) we can vote for the budget based on what we think makes sense, without fear that the BOF will lower the boom if the voters displease them.

We can also have a better process for budget creation. We can assign subgroups of BOF members to different departments, who can meet in advance and better understand how the different departments plan their budgets. We can work more effectively through cooperation without being adversarial. This spring, the Director of Park and Recreation attended one meeting where two BOF members proposed that the P&R budget be cut to zero, a decision that seems to have been based on zero information, while giving the Director zero warning. Democrats appreciate the people who serve our town, and the good work of P&R, and reject such ill-informed surprise attacks.

Our budget surplus grew to over \$7 million, and we are now decreasing it. This means that for a few years the taxpayers paid more than we spent and the difference increased the surplus; then the opposite happened and the surplus subsidized the taxpayers. The taxpayers in some years subsidized those in later years. Perfection is impossible, but we should avoid this where possible.

We can establish policies and discipline to better manage our surplus, while also doing more forward planning that looks five years ahead instead of just scrambling to get the budget set one year at a time. We made a little progress in this direction this past spring; more progress is needed for the BOF to manage this better.