

[Scott]

This is the Better Brighton podcast. I'm your host, Scott Fybush, and we are continuing our conversations with the three candidates for the two seats on Brighton town board that are up for election. June 24th is the Democratic primary election, June 14th to 22nd will be early voting, and joining me for this hour of conversation is Clara Sanguinetti, who is the newcomer out of the three. Welcome Clara!

[Clara]

Thank you, Scott! Good to be here.

[Scott]

Good to have you with me. So the same ground rules are applying for all these interviews, and I just want to set them out as we get started with each of these. Just like all the other candidates, I haven't told you what the questions are going to be other than some general themes. Um, by way of disclosure, we've only met the once so far. Um, and I want to put that out just because I've, you know, this being a small town, you get to know everybody. I have, of course, encountered our two incumbents, uh Robin Wilt and Christine Corrado, on numerous occasions. Clara we just met last week. She came over and had a very interesting conversation with me, with my wife, Lisa, and our son, Eli. I'm eager to continue some of that right now.

[Clara]

And Sadie.

[Scott]

Sadie, yes, of course. Sadie the Brittany. Uh, and the other ground rule is none of this is going to be edited. Your answers are your answers. The only editing that we'll do is if we need to for any technical reasons. If we need to take any breaks, or if the dog starts barking, which is known to happen on a sunny day in Brighton. And, of course, we have one of those today. So, thank you for being with me. Let's, let's kind of start with your story. What? Uh, what brought you to Brighton and from where?

[Clara]

I love that story. Okay, so it starts, I would say 1987. I'm born in Argentina. And you know? I'm the oldest of four. And I feel like, you know, for people that know me? I guess it clicks that I'm the oldest sister. You know, living in Argentina was quite an adventure. And I'm very blessed to have, you know, my mom, she's essentially my rock, you know, single mother of four, she had to have four jobs. Essentially, you know, life was really tough for her, but we never really saw it, you know? She filled her home with with love, with books, and I always, you know, grew up looking up to her. And then it got to a point you know that I started, dreaming a bit more. And I remember, I think I was eight years old and you know, you get asked the question often. What do you want to be when you grow up? Oh, my classmates would say things like, a teacher, nurse, soccer player. But I had a different response. I wanted to be a U.S citizen. You know from all the movies and the books I was reading, I just felt like, you know, this country was a place where you could dream and there was no limit, you know? So, I guess, like, I started planning to come to to the US, and I was very blessed to get a full scholarship to study here for undergrad at Dickinson.

[Scott]

In Pennsylvania, right?

[Clara]

Pennsylvania, yes. Oh my God, it was like, you know, an education beyond anything I had ever dreamed. It really opened up all the doors for me. And then I came here to Rochester to do my MBA at U of R, so I did my MBA assignment, and that's where I met my now husband. So long story short, I was like, yep, I'll stay here, and we chose Brighton to be our forever home. We fell in love with the town, with our neighbors. And just to give you like a cultural reference, it will out me as Millennial, but I don't know if you've ever watched The Gilmore Girls, but that's one of the shows that helped me learn English. And I remember it's a town just like Brighton, where people can walk everywhere, everyone's showing up for each other, even in most episodes, there's a town hall meeting where all the neighbors go to.

[Scott]

There's all kinds of gossip behind the scenes.

[Clara]

Yes. You know, everyone cares for each other a lot in that show, but I remember thinking, like, that was just the magic of Brighton, like the moment we moved in to our home. We had neighbors coming up to introduce themselves, bringing us cookies, ice cream, beer, just offering like, "We're here for you. Let us know if you need anything." I mean, I've lived in different parts of the world. That, for me, was, like, wow, we found our place. That was 10 years ago.

[Scott]

In Argentina, were you in a large city? What part of Argentina are you from?

[Clara]

I grew up right outside the main city. It's Buenos Aires, where everything's large. I want to say the greater Buenos Aires area has 20 million people.

[Scott]

I was going to say, it's an enormous city.

[Clara]

I mean, just to get to school, I had to walk 20 minutes, take a train ride for another 40 minutes and then walk another 10 minutes, just one way, to make it to school and that was just a normal day. So I knew growing up that that was not for me. It is for some people. Some people thrive in huge cities. I know that I wanted something smaller. For me, Brighton is the perfect size.

[Scott]

Your background has been primarily in municipal finance, right?

[Clara]

Yes, so that's what I did right after my MBA. I always really loved the fixed income side of finance, and I was really blessed to get an internship at what used to be the Rochester Fund that later became the Oppenheimer Fund. That's all they did, municipal finance. So essentially, you're looking at the sector within fixed income that focuses on municipal bonds. Just to explain a little bit, what that is is when different municipalities in the US, whether that's a town, a state, a hospital or a school district, when they need financing to build a new library or renovate the school gymnasium, they have access to a type of borrowing that is most of the time tax exempt, so it helps the towns get financing at a lower cost, and at the same time it allows investors, mom-and-pop investors, to be able to put their money, buy a bond, invest in, you know, you can buy a Brighton Bond. Like, sometimes I look at the Brighton School District bonds popping up here and there, but it's a great way to like, invest, you know, in the infrastructure of your own town and also get some tax-exempt interest, um, while you're at it, but that's essentially the gist of municipal finance. So, as a municipal finance analyst, I was looking at all these different types of issuances, a lot of them in New York State, so that involves what town wants to issue money for whatever reason. So you start with, you know, dissecting. Um, it goes from demographic. You look at the comprehensive plan of the town, you look at zoning, any type of economic trends, you look at the management of the town as well, essentially take a deep dive into all the stakeholders. Is this project feasible? And that was essentially my work as an analyst.

[Scott]

So, a lot of people do that as work. You've decided to go from doing this as work. Now you want to do this on the other side and actually be part of the town board that, among other things, it has a lot of this oversight over town finances. What led you to this idea of, "OK, I want to actually run for something here."

[Clara]

Thank you! So I love that question, because for me, it was never a matter of if, it was a matter of when. I've always lived a life of service in whichever way that was available to me. There was a big change when I finally became a US citizen, you know. I told you that had been my plan for a long time. It did take me 16 years. It was not an easy process. Pretty gruesome at times, but when I finally became a US citizen, that's when I was able to do a lot of things that before I couldn't.

I knew it wasn't the same, not being a citizen, but I didn't know how much so. So I was able to join the Brighton Democratic Committee, and you have to be a citizen for that. I was able to run a campaign to be elected into the Brighton Democratic Committee. I was able to be appointed to the planning board of the town. Again, you have

to be a US citizen for that. So, that's what really let me see. Like, there's a whole new world where I can be of service to my community.

[Scott]

Were you approached for the Democratic committee? Or is that something you just wanted to do on your own.

[Clara]

Yeah, I learned there was such a thing, and I was, like, oh, I want to do that. You know, I'm a very proud Democrat, even before I was a citizen. So that seemed like a very natural next step, and the fact that Brighton is divided into different electoral districts, and I represent a neighborhood that's in East Brighton. I mean you have to, like knocking on doors introducing myself here now.

What makes their neighborhood so special? It's a beautiful neighborhood, and being able to have their support and get elected by them, it was such a highlight. Again, things that started leading me to this path. And very simple logistical changes. My mom moved to Brighton. And I think the second part of my life started when my mom moved here, because she's been so incredibly helpful in helping us with the kids. Being able to run for any position requires a lot of time and resources. So? Being able to have my mom help my husband and I was also a big, big change that allowed me to. You know throw my hat in the ring.

[Scott]

Let's talk about your family a little bit. You are you are raising a young family in Brighton. Tell me a little bit about about your husband, about your kids.

[Clara]

I mean, my husband is my everything, He's like another, pillar of the Clara foundation. I would say, from the moment I met him, the very first time I met him, I knew this was my person. We both have three wonderful kids. Nine, seven and four years old. And they're, I would say, the reason for our existence. And you know, part of what we do is for our kids, for the kids of our community. They drive everything we do. They're very into sports, arts and their friends. They absolutely adore their friends, and we live not too far from here, on Warrenton Drive. We have such a special, beautiful community. The kids will just come and knock on their door, just to check in, if my kids want to go on a bike ride.

And the community takes care of each other in our neighborhood. Just to give you a quick example, last week, I think there was a car speeding by or something. My oldest was playing ball with with one of our neighbors, and the ball went to a street, and thank God nothing happened, but one of my neighbors saw it happen. She called me right away. Just having that community, like looking out for each other, looking out for each other's children, just like as if they were your own. And that's something very special we have here in Brighton.

[Scott]

And they're in Brighton Central Schools.

[Clara]

Brighton Central Schools, which, I mean, you almost feel like there's unicorns and butterflies popping out of the walls. We do a good job, and my kids have been very happy. I'm telling a little story. We have a bilingual household, and I've always spoken in Spanish to my kids. But it wasn't until they went to Council Rock where they went into a classroom where there's kids, they're learning English as a second language, so they get extra resources. So blessed to have that here in our schools. And my oldest two, they were listening to all different languages on an everyday basis, and my oldest comes home one day, and it's like, you know what? It's pretty cool that we speak Spanish. Obviously, I could tell him that every day for his for the rest of his life, he would never take my word for it, but he saw that in action. ]I think in his kindergarten class, there were eight different languages, different cultures, different traditions, different religions and again, I think it was a life-changing experience for him for a family. So we're very happy.

[Scott]

It's a remarkable difference, and you know, I'm a Brighton Alum from class of 88. And seeing the difference between what the demographics were when I was in school here in the 70s and 80s compared to what my kids have experienced. We've had kids in school for what, 17, 18 years in Brighton. And yeah, there's definitely, it's just just an explosion of ethnicities of languages, of religion. Which is one of the things that I do celebrate about the town.

[Clara]

Same here. I mean, that's one of the most wonderful things about Brighton, and I believe is why many people want to move here, want to just welcome diversity and celebrate it. And I see that at many levels throughout our town, but also included in our schools.

[Scott]

Let's get into some town issues here, because you're in an interesting position. And again, we said this off the beginning, we'll say it again. There are three candidates right now who are running for two seats. The reason why I'm doing this is because it's this interesting situation where we have two incumbents, one of whom, Christine Corrado, has also been endorsed again by the Brighton Democratic committee, and one of whom, Robin Wilt, did not get the endorsement. You did get the endorsement as a newcomer. And so it's an interesting dynamic. And of course, when people go into the polls, they have an opportunity to vote for up to two, so it could be any combination of any one or two of the three of you. What is the basic argument? You know, you said you've been out knocking on doors all weekend, as you have to, because that's that's retail politics, and that's democracy. What is the basic argument if somebody says to you, why should I pick somebody who's new for this versus people who have been on this board now for multiple terms. What's your pitch?

[Clara]

Thank you Scott, and that's a fair question that I get asked as well. And I think my first suggestion for everyone is look into the three candidates. I think there's three great candidates. All of us have something to offer to the town. And that's my first thing. My job is to be an open book, show you why I stand for what I offer. And then ultimately I want every voter in Brighton to make as well-informed a decision as possible. I bring a new perspective, as we've discussed before, being a young parent, being an immigrant. I would be the first Latina immigrant to be elected to the board. I bring a new perspective and also bring a new set of skills which, I appreciate your question about my background. Having that background in municipal finance and planning, I believe at this point in time in our town, We need it more than ever. Especially when it comes to the dictatorship we're facing with our federal government. Our town is the very last line of defense, so I strongly believe we should make sure that our town is as resilient as ever. And part of that comes with finance and planning. We have a great comprehensive plan.

[Clara]

Um. You know, covers things as broadly. As you know, social Equity. With accessibility, environmental justice. Topics as well, expanding our tax base. And those are all issues that are covered in the comprehensive plan, but we need to. There's a lot of opportunity for improvement to make sure that we have the tools to make those that Vision happen, for instance. We're looking at our town code. There's a lot of room for improvement there to make sure that those ideas that we have can actually be. Turning to reality. So, I have the skills I have the perspective and I think I've mentioned this last week, Scott. One of the hardest things for me in this campaign has been to brag about myself. It doesn't come naturally, I swear. Um. But there's one thing I'm good at. I'm good at getting stuff done.

[Scott]

Let's talk a little about some of these specifics, and there have been, I'm gonna, you know, as I've been doing with all these interviews where they're appropriate, bringing in some of the questions that came up when I put this out on some of the town social media groups about what questions do you want to ask to the candidates? And it's interesting, a little bit heartening for me as a policy geek, to see how many questions come up about code issues. There are a lot of people who want to know what can we do and the big issues seem to come up repeatedly...Monroe Avenue, and the state of some of those commercial properties along Monroe Avenue, that I think most of us can agree could see some higher and better and more revenue-producing uses to the town. And then also making living opportunities in town that are better for people. You know, this whole question that keeps coming up about these auxiliary dwelling units, which right now the town for most part does not permit, what can we do and how can you actually bring this change about in what ends to be kind of a glacial pace of a system? Share with me some of the ideas that you would try to bring into some of these code discussions.

[Clara]

Thank you, Scott, and I appreciate you bringing that up, on Facebook posts. Because that's ultimately what I love and what we need. And what I've seen throughout my career is, the most successful projects are the ones that take the most input from the citizens. Um, we have a great opportunity on more revenue, you know. That's

one of our main commercial corridors. Um, if anything, we have a problem with density. We could do a better job utilizing the commercial space. Um. The term, essentially, mixed-use development. So think of retail at the bottom, residential apartment on top. That kind of solves two things at once. It helps expand our tax base, and by that, I mean, you bring new taxpayers. It helps solve, or at least mitigate, our housing problem, um. We have a lot of beautiful neighborhoods. But I think we could do with a bit more diversity in types of housing offered, and having that mixed use on our commercial streets would solve, would alleviate part of that problem. So for that, we need to be improving our town code to let that happen. Because you know, at this point, if you ever had a project like that in mind, and you had the resources to do it, you have to sit through a lot of meetings, and get the variances, and then go back to the meetings, and then maybe get more variances. So, at this point, it's not a very efficient process if you want to get that done. So that's why, you know, the town did such a great job. And that includes the residents that participated in multiple forums and charrettes and steering committees to make that 2018 comprehensive plan, you know, the Envision Brighton project happen. We have strategies, the tools, you know, the town codes to enable it to happen.

[Scott]

In terms of just making things more flexible, and I'm thinking of the one poor guy who has been all over town social media in the last couple of weeks about this tree that has been growing up by his driveway, and the roots have grown into the driveway and pushed up the pavement, and made it impossible for cars to get in and out, and it took him a month plus of meetings and public notices and all of this just to get the town to agree, yeah, this tree needs to be removed. Which, finally, it's going to be removed, I guess. And he's getting the tree removed, but I think there's a fairly wide consensus view that it didn't need to be that complicated on the ground. How do you actually, and especially coming in as one of multiple members on a town board, how do you push to try to make some of those things happen more smoothly and easily for people?

[Clara]

So, I am aware of that tree. And I believe, well, we're designated as, I want to say Tree City, USA. You know, there is a program that we participated in. In other words, I believe we're a tree sanctuary town. And I understand. We want to be more environmentally conscious. We need to be aware of our canopy. We need to be aware of, you know, the negative impact that could be if we were to start removing trees. But at the same time, the trees presenting a safety hazard, or, you know, damaging infrastructure, housing included? We should be able to like, see if there's ways to make the process more efficient. So, yes, I, my day job is to make people's lives simpler. Um, I'm a planner, financial planner, a broker, but ultimately, what I do is, I see a problem, and the first thing I do is, like, okay, let's identify the problem. Let's not wish it away. Let's assemble a team that can really look at this to see how we can make it better. No law is perfect. There's always room for improvement, so this this could be one of the things that we need to, when we take a look back, how can we make it more efficient?

[Scott]

Another one of these issues that came up, and it's actually, you know, part of what propelled me into doing all of this is, as we discussed when we met last week, was this issue of recreational facilities in the town. And Lisa and I kind of got drawn into a lot of this last summer with the debate about whether or not the pool was going to be kept in town, and a lot of the public notice that was or was not given around that. And obviously, as a non-incumbent, you know, there are some questions that I have for the incumbents that aren't necessarily ones that you can answer in this scenario. But let's talk generally about recreation, because of course we still are years away from getting some sort of a rec center in town. What's your perception, especially as a parent with small kids, of how our recreation facilities are, how they should be, and what the timeline ought to be to get them there and in a way, particularly in your context, in a way that is financially responsible.

[Clara]

So, the need for a community center is, I would say has been top five of the issues that I've been discussing at the door. You know, I was just trying to count, I think I've knocked on maybe 1500 doors in the last few months. And yes, one of the top five issues has been the need for a community center, so people definitely agree, we need a community center. I'm very excited to see, it was mentioned on the Envision plan, There was a feasibility study done, I don't know if you recall it. I remember participating in the survey, so that was like, first things first, something that always keeps me. Just comforting, knowing that people's feedback is taken into consideration. So, that survey was done a while ago. I believe what happened, COVID kind of derailed the process. But I remember it also being mentioned on the State of the Town that now the things will start getting moving again. So, I'm completely...we need a community center. Not just for, you know, the recreational facilities, but also for community building. I think our community really needs to have a shared space, not only just for like health

activities, but just to build those connections. You know, take our community out of Facebook into, like real life. A real live space. So, so I'm I'm excited to see that feasibility study when it comes out, and get to work.

[Scott]

Any of what a realistic time frame might look like here because you know the sense was first, well, maybe we'll have something in 2028. It's starting to look late for 2028, and for those of us who are older Brightonians, how long, how long, realistically, do you think we're all waiting to actually see something built?

[Clara]

That's a great question. I mean, for that, I can tell you most likely we would be doing a pretty large, you know, municipal bond issuance to cover, you know, the cause, the capital cost of building a community center? So I, I don't feel comfortable giving you like an exact timeline, but I would think hopefully, I would hope that, you know, by 2030, we could see a community center.

[Scott]

What's your sense in terms of the balance of Brighton's budget? Because this is also another issue, maybe it doesn't come up necessarily as a top five door to door, but when you really dig down into where the town's budget goes, a lot of the town budget goes to policing. Is that in your sense an appropriate balance of budget? Would you change anything in that sense in terms of growing or shrinking that percentage to allocate elsewhere? What's your sense of it as a financial professional?

[Clara]

Yeah, so that's, that's a fair, um, assessment. It's a pretty large investment of our taxpayers dollars goes into a Brighton Police Department, um. But I can tell you that the people I've been speaking with see the value in that investment. There's a sense of, you know, having your own police, you can make it a really community-driven, public safety department where the voters have oversight. You know, where the town citizens, not elected officials, but citizens can be part of the hiring process. Where the timing of the first responders, it's close to, like zero. I don't know if you guys heard about this, but I want to say like two weeks ago, you know, my oldest is at French (Road) Elementary, and there were a few, you know, emergency situations happening outside and right across the street. And within seconds, the Brighton Police Department was there. That would not be the case if we were waiting for the sheriff. They just have a much, much, more expansive territory. So their response is not going to be the same as having your own. So I myself, and everyone I've spoken to about this topic, we see the value, so I feel like as long as you see the value, it's something that you don't mind paying taxes for, If I'm looking at the budget as a whole, I could see that there's room to expand our tax base again. Which means, ultimately, we lower the tax burden on individuals. That would be a great way to to bring more more dollars to, like, better utilize the space that we already have zoned for commercial. You know, it breaks my heart to walk down Monroe Avenue, and I see a lot of, you know, great potential for a lot more businesses to come to our town. So, that would be a way that...you know, help the finances of the town, just bringing more taxpayers into the mix.

[Scott]

I need to ask too, of course, it's a different question for you as a non-incumbent than it is for the two who are on the board while this was going on, but what was your perspective on what we just went through with the reassessment that ended up getting pulled back and is now going to need to be redone. Looking at that, just as a Brighton homeowner and taxpayer, what were your thoughts on that?

[Clara]

I knew it had to happen. We hadn't had a reassessment since 2018. But, you know, again, I go back to my door to door, because just speaking with neighbors, bringing the letters to me, right? I was like trying to...

[Scott]

We still have ours sitting here.

[Clara]

I have mine too. I don't have any inside knowledge of what happened. From an outsider's perspective, I think no valuation process is perfect. So usually what happens is you try to hit as many as accurately as possible. And then the outliers have the chance to informally challenge and then more formally challenge the valuation. That's how you try to do a reassessment. In this case, I believe there were too many outliers. That whatever process they used didn't really get it accurately. So, for those people, obviously by law, to run a fair process, everyone

deserves the same chance to go and informally challenge the reassessment. And there were just not enough time to allocate to accommodate all those neighbors. So that's when the town decided, yes, we have to cancel, we have to suspend the reassessment. So, I'm not sure as to what went wrong, but I'm glad to see the process, because yes, I was getting neighbors showing me the letters with numbers that make no sense. I think also part of it, which I would like to see more of, would be more education about where reassessment was. Because I was hearing a lot of, again, not really fully understanding what it meant. So it's not, you know, a lot of people saw, oh, my reassessment doubled. Does that mean my taxes are doubling? And that's not the case. But if you don't have that background education, it's not your fault. You just wouldn't know. So I would like to see more, maybe workshops, more tutorials, Zoom, in person. To know that, you know, reassessing a town doesn't mean your taxes are going up. If anything, it's just like re-slicing the cake. Whenever a long time goes from the last reassessment, what ends up happening is many neighbors are overpaying, many neighbors are underpaying. The reassessment's trying to even the field. So, yes, I would imagine education would be very helpful in that sense.

[Scott]

We are a little past halfway through our hour together, talking with Clara Sanguinetti here on the Better Brighton podcast, and this kind of turns us to the next very big topic, which is this issue of communication. We discussed this when when we met last week, and it came up certainly with reassessment, but another issue is too, this feeling that...you know, there's just, we're not getting all of the information as efficiently as we should coming from the people in town who know what's going on, and whose job it should be to share with us. So let's start, probably, just what are your thoughts on how well the town communication process does or doesn't work right now, and what changes would you bring to bear on it?

[Clara]

So, I think the town relies a lot on Facebook, and it gets a lot of the message across. However, I myself, I think Facebook can be used for a lot of good, but I think it also, it's designed to bring toxicity into a community. Which is one of the reasons why I'm not really on Facebook that much. I see a lot of, like, very easy conversations that would be solved if you were talking face to face and that become into, like, fights on Facebook. That really breaks my heart to see. So, I think there's a lot of technology we can leverage to make communication easier, you know, not really having to spend too many resources on it. This is another topic people have been bringing up at the door. People would like to see an email newsletter. Just like many towns around us do it. You go on the website, you type in your email, and you opt into getting a monthly newsletter. In this newsletter, you could have information like upcoming events, upcoming changes, like anything that's about to be like...you know, waste management service changes can be highlighted there. Permits, so like, if Frontier got a permit to dig up your front yard, that would appear on the newsletter. So I'm just talking like one page. Everyone has a hundred thousand things going on. It's just to make people's lives easier. So I think that would be a way to leverage technology. To bring some good in terms of improvements in communication, and take that off Facebook.

Another thing I've been thinking about for the town could be to have a one-stop website. It almost would work like a task manager for grievances. So if you have a problem, you just go to this one landing page where you type in what's going on. You can categorize it. Is it highway, is it public works, is it sewer, whatever it is. If you need to add pictures showing the issue, that's all on the same page. And that goes to the designated person in our town hall that can triage those concerns to the specific department in charge, and then they can track that concern. You know, the town staff is incredibly busy. I think this could also help them manage those processes better so that...you know, I don't want people having to feel like the only place to get anything solved is by going and typing it on Facebook. Unfortunately, that's how it works right now, but I feel like, with very easy, low-hanging fruit fixes towards software, we could make that easier for everyone -- for our neighbors, for leadership, and for our town staff.

[Scott]

And it's interesting, kind of unique to Brighton, I think, that people tag the town supervisor specifically in a lot of this, and it kind of falls on him to personally respond or not respond as he chooses. Let's talk a little bit about...the position that is not up for any competing election this year is Town Supervisor. Bill Moehle's running again, with the endorsement of the Democratic committee, for another...it'll be a slightly shortened term in this case because of the way that the terms are changing. You know, you are somebody who, going through the citizenship process, has thought a lot about democracy. You are here on purpose. As something of an outsider coming into this, what do you think of that system? Is it working for us as a town? Could it be better?

[Clara]

Well, another great question. So I can tell you from my experience, my first reaction was, like, I was so proud of myself for not only becoming a US citizen, but also deciding to throw my hat in the ring to service my community. If anything, I think having an option, giving an option to our neighbors, only strengthens democracy. But I got, not from many people, but there's a good group of people that were like, well, who's stepping down? Like, I don't think anyone's stepping down. It's like, what do you mean, you're challenging an incumbent? I got some of, how dare you? And I understand change is hard, but at the end, I feel like our neighbors of this town are some of the smartest, most passionate, most civically engaged people I've ever met in my entire life. And I come from Argentina.

So the people deserve to have a choice. I trust our neighbors that they will do the research and make the choice that feels good to them. So yes, got a lot of pushback for running. I think before going through this process, I always thought, why is no one else running for any position? But running here, myself, I understand. It's not easy, running, if there's no one stepping down. But I think ultimately, it makes democracy stronger. It makes us better candidates because now we're engaging with neighbors. We're having honest conversations that, if we didn't have a primary, I don't think these conversations would be happening.

[Scott]

Agreed, and by the way, just for the record, and I have a feeling that Bill will end up listening to these, the mic is wide open, Bill knows where I live. I would love to have him on here as well, and to have this kind of conversation with him about some of the issues with the town. And I think he knows, we have some honest disagreements about things, we have some very honest agreements about things. Um, My bias, as I've said to you, and as I've said on other episodes of this podcast, is I'm all in favor of small-D democracy. I love the idea that we have these choices, and I love the idea this year, I don't think there are any terrible choices. There's nothing that I'm looking at and saying, wow, this threatens the fabric of democracy in Brighton, regardless of who ends up getting the Democratic nomination and getting elected in November.

[Clara]

And look, see what you did? I think it's what we need more of in this town. Because you reach out to all the candidates equally, You've endorsed Robin in the past, but that didn't stop you from reaching out to me and Christine. And it's like, I want to give you the same opportunity to have this conversation, to have access to the neighbors of Brighton, and I think we should all be doing more of.

And when I first started my campaign, again, I got a lot of healthy pushback. I love to be challenged, and I was telling people before, I remember reading, I think he was a county legislator, someone shared a screenshot with me questioning whether I was deserving of the endorsement. And I'm, like, that's fine. Say anything you want about me, but let me buy you a coffee first. Give me five minutes. You know, again, I am aware that I'm a newbie. So, it's on me to offer that information, but give me a chance before people start discrediting, why a non-incumbent will be worthy of an endorsement. I posted it on my Facebook, but I will meet with anyone at any time. Just send me an email. And this is for your listeners, too. If they're not satisfied with an answer I gave, or they want to follow up, Clara@ClaraForBrighton.com. Please send me an email. I will be honored and happy to give you a call, come knock at your door, meet you outside your office, whatever works best for you.

[Scott]

And there is also, I should mention, if you're catching this early enough, June 2 will be the League Of Women Voters forum, and that's going to be done only on Zoom, I understand?

[Clara]

Yes, the candidates will be present in person, but yes, it will be on Zoom for viewers.

[Scott]

How times have changed!

[Clara]

Yeah, well, thank you for the shout out. I'm excited for it.

[Scott]

I'm excited, I mean, any of these opportunities, as we've discussed, too, part of the issue here is that we no longer really have journalism covering the town. And I should just be clear on this, when I said what I said about Robin back in February, this was before I realized there was going to be a need for this particular forum. And in

the context of this forum, I am putting my retired journalist hat back on. So I'm not telling anybody who I'm voting for until I go into the booth. And that's the great thing. I mean, it's up to anybody to pick one or two out of the three

and vote for them. I want to talk a little bit about broader issues. Obviously, there are things that a Town Council does. Potholes and roads and garbage pickup and town codes and taxes, and all of that. And there are a lot of things that a town board is not responsible for, but people still have opinions, and people still vote based on them. So, I want to talk first of all, I mean, just about, you know, you had mentioned what you're seeing in in Washington with autocracy there, and I think all three of the candidates have said basically the same thing. What can a town board do when faced with this at higher levels in Washington? What kind of push, you know, I think there is a sense among some more progressive Democrats, that maybe we're not getting out of our representatives in Washington and Albany, the kind of energy that we need at a time like this. What's your sense of the moment?

[Clara]

We live in very scary times, so that's something I'm fully aware of, and I think I briefly mentioned before. There's a lot we can...as town board members...we can't directly make national-level policy decisions, but there's a lot we can do locally. We can, for example, join Amicus briefs and defend sanctuary policy. You know, policies and statements for the town, and make sure that, when we are on any level town decision, whether that's policy or programming or taxation, that we're taking diversity, equity and inclusion into every single decision the town makes. Whether that's accessibility for a public building. Whether that's crosswalks. Whether that's access to education and different resources. Like, are town meetings diverse enough in terms of timing and place to make sure that everyone, no matter where they live in the town or what job schedule they have, or if they're caring for their parents or their kids (can attend). So I feel like, DEI can be applied on a very broad basis. I'm very passionate about not just talking about it, but putting it into action.

So those are some of the things we can do. And also work collaboratively with our state and representatives, like (State) Senator Cooney and Congressman Morelle and Assembly Member Clark. We have partners, and we have to leverage those relationships and reach out to them. I think they're all doing a great job. I mean, Senator Cooney was just here last week, and that gives me a lot of peace of mind that we have people standing up for our community as well as ourselves.

[Scott]

How active should Brighton be on the town level in dealing with some of the international issues that certainly affect the lives of Brightonians? You know, we have a very large and very active Jewish population here that is very vocal on the Israel-Palestine issue. We have people who are on the other side of it as well. What is the role as a town board member? How do you responsibly handle that?

[Clara]

Thank you Scott for that question. And I think you highlighted that in your question, you know these are international issues, and based on the feedback that I'm also getting at the door, a lot of neighbors are concerned that their town board is not really focused as locally as it should (be). That's a concern I've been hearing. As a town board member, I would be representing our neighbors in everything that's local. Like you said, our programming, our inclusion in terms of accessibility, code improvements, finances, the sewer, the potholes, everything that affects people on a daily basis.

I don't know if you know, but I was born in Argentina only four years after the last dictatorship, so I grew up knowing how fragile democracy is, how precious it is, and how it's everyone's job to protect it. Freedom of speech and the right to peaceful protest is a pillar of our democracy. So I was very happy to see how passionate and involved and committed our neighbors are in Brighton. Um, But yes, again, at the end of the day, I think it's okay, it should be encouraged to have difficult conversations in a peaceful setting like we are here right now. I encourage people to reach out to one another. Because yeah, our community has been suffering. Tension is running high, but ultimately as a town board member, I had to remind everyone I'm not running for Congress, I'm not running to be the ambassador to any country around the world, I'm running to be your next council member here in Brighton.

[Scott]

It's a difficult thing, I think, sometimes for people to remember, this is what we're focused on. I'm just curious, I don't know if you have an answer for this or thought deeply enough about it, would you have supported the ordinance that was voted on a while back about about regulating protests at 12 Corners.

[Clara]

Yes, another something that I was paying close attention to because I was fascinated by the process, and that's how I think all major changes in the town should be handled. I saw people from all different parts of the spectrum of opinions on the matter showing up, speaking up, their minds being heard. Multiple meetings and the town really taking all that in. The lawyers of the town doing research on different cases around the country. And I think what ended up coming out of that was a very narrow law. And the way I see that law functioning, and I've been to some of the permitted events already, it's again very narrow, so that it only really sets a framework to allow for protests happening, at the same time, being mindful of public safety and the environmental impact of those events. So that very, very few, if any protests ever get denied. So that's what we're seeing a lot right now. I'm not aware of any event or protest being denied, but I feel like if at some point that started happening, that I don't think that would have been an intention of a permit law. So, yes, I mean, like I said, no law is perfect, so if there's a way that the law can come back to the table to be improved on, I would completely support that.

[Scott]

So we're down to about 10 minutes left, and I have to ask, have we hit on everything that comes up at the doors? I'm very curious, if you're going out, I mean this is such a front line, finding out what is on people's minds. What other topics have been coming up as you're walking the streets?

[Clara]

I love that question. You know, I was just in, again, the neighborhood that I represent on the Brighton Democratic committee, East Brighton, off Penfield Road, which is a very busy road. And a lot of neighbors have been complaining about street safety. Crosswalks. And that's when I found an issue now because we have a lot of roads, and I know you're aware of this, that are not owned by the town. They're owned by the county or the state, so that adds a whole extra layer of bureaucracy that we have to go through to make things happen.

So, you know, Christine, she does a lot for street safety. So Christine and I were meeting with a lot of neighbors out in East Brighton, talking about, what's the process? How do you get a crosswalk? And yes, and maybe the first reaction from the counties? No. So the next step is, okay, how do we go from no to maybe, and you do things like, you work on petitions, and you get people organized, and you start showing up to meetings, and then the no to a maybe. And then you collaborate with our county officials, and then the maybe turns into a yes. It takes time. It's a process. Because some issues on street safety have been coming up. Communication is something that can always be improved, and that would be something that I would love to help the town leadership work on. And ultimately, our local economy. We have a wonderful diverse offering of businesses, but we do have something called retail leakage. A lot of our neighbors have the need to drive away from Brighton, and again, that's also costs. It also causes environmental impact of having people need to get in their cars to get different goods and services that are not being satisfied by what we have here in Brighton, so that goes back to how we can make our comprehensive plan happen. So looking at not only the town code, but also the approval and permitting process. How can we streamline to make it easier for a small business to say, you know what? I'm going to set up shop in Brighton because I feel welcome, and I feel like it's an easy process, and I want to be part of the community.

[Scott]

And we've seen that. I mean issues just with regulating signage.

[Clara]

Yeah, we've been talking about signs. On the planning board, we get to also approve the signs. Which come previously approved from the architectural review board. So, an idea, right there, I'll give you. I don't think the planning board needs to see it if the architectural review board and the town staff has already approved it. That would be one example of, you can shave off a month or two from the process right there. But again, that needs to be updated in the code.

[Scott]

I want to give you a chance, too, in our in our final minutes here...you were talking about just some of the people that you've met in walking around Brighton, and I know I have a tendency certainly when we're getting into these conversations online of getting cynical about the town and getting cynical about a lot of the processes. But there are a lot of cool people in this town.

[Clara]

Many cool people, oh my God. Every day has been a completely new experience, and I have to tell you, that's been my absolute favorite part of the campaign, meeting all of you guys. The incredible stories. I was telling you, I was in West Brighton. Edward Graham is one of our neighbors, and also Brighton Democratic Committee members, and he makes one of the most wonderful honeys that's very well renowned. It was sad that he didn't have available honey right then and there, but he showed me in his back yard the amazing beehives, and he explained the process to me, and it was just fascinating to see, like it was just right then and there that I got to see. I had never seen it in real life before, and it was just an experience from knocking on someone's door.

It was just yesterday, this lovely man that you know, he had run for town board a few decades ago, and he was explaining the process of what it was to run back when Brighton was Republican. It was a whole different story? You know, we're just sharing battle stories and some of his experience. I mean again, the people of this community are just some of the most fascinating people I've seen, and I've lived in different countries throughout my life. Again, I'm very proud. I'm just very honored that I'm able to at least be a candidate, and hopefully potentially be able to represent all of you on the town board.

[Scott]

If you don't win this year, what's next? I'm assuming this will not be the last time that we see you running for this position.

[Clara]

I think that's a very fair assessment because ultimately I trust the people of Brighton. If for some reason they don't believe that it's my time yet, I completely respect that position. I'm a proud Democrat. I wouldn't run as anything else. So, yes, if I don't make it through this first primary I'll continue serving Brighton in every way I can. I'll continue serving East Brighton, my neighborhood in the Brighton Democratic Committee, in every possible way. I'm an event chair with Brighton Schools PTSA. I'm on the board of Temple B'rith Kodesh.

And in every position, if there's a way that I can add a value, I'll help. They don't have to have a specific type of hat. I'll find an opportunity and make sure that I can make some good changes.

[Scott]

Excellent! Um, one more quick question, we're running up against the hour here, but as you mentioned in this kind of interesting, Brighton Democratic Committee setup, even though you live in Central Brighton, you're representing this area in East Brighton, and during the pandemic, I said, I'm going to walk every street in the town, and I kind of didn't realize when I started doing it how much town there was going east and west. And I found myself out by the Genesee River walking along some of those streets there, my sister lives out in West Brighton, so I know that area a little bit, and then all these neighborhoods that I always think of, oh, this is Penfield. No, it's not, it's Brighton.

[Clara]

It's Brighton.

[Scott]

What can the town do to sort of make those areas feel more like we're all part of one big town, even though they're not necessarily in the same school district, they may be going shopping somewhere else.

[Clara]

Well, I think you brought up earlier...a community center could make that, facilitate more community building. I think the town has West Brighton and East Brighton community forums. I feel like, monthly newsletters, for instance, just bring that up. And also, I feel like representatives walking and door knocking. I did get that when I was first running the first campaign to be elected into the Brighton Democratic Committee. I got some oh, we're Brighton? Sometimes yeah, this is the town of Brighton. I was double checking my list, yeah, this is Brighton.

[Scott]

My sister asked me, she said, can I vote in this election? I said, it's not a school board. You're in the town.

[Clara]

I know, and you're as much of Brighton as Central Brighton, as any part of Brighton. But yes, I think there's things we can do. I think more community building across different regions across the town could help with that as well. I can realize that I do a lot with with Central Brighton School District because my kids are in the school.

So also, being conscious of, let's go to other events that are not just in central Brighton. We can all show up for each other's events. Like Tree Town Cafe, for example, is in East Brighton, like maybe you go out of your way a little bit to go grab your brunch there on Sunday, or you know, coffee, meet up with a friend. Maybe you change your location. You're still supporting the town, but just like a bit, you know, maybe five minutes further than you would otherwise. We have a wonderful town, and then people, it's what make this town amazing.

[Scott]

I love some of those reminders that will come up when somebody will mention something along West Henrietta Road, they'll say it's in Henrietta, and everybody's, no, no, that's Brighton, really! We had a Schaller's in Brighton once upon a time.

[Clara]

And also, Brighton, and I would say all the towns surrounding are just a wonderful thing, and I think also, we can keep working on those relationships with our neighboring towns. I think, well, all of Monroe County. When the city of Rochester is doing better, we're all doing better. When Brighton's doing better, everyone around us is doing better. We're very interconnected, so that's also important.

[Scott]

When I can walk six blocks up and be in in the city of Rochester, absolutely.

Clara Sanguinetti, thank you again so much for taking this hour to talk with me on the Better Brighton podcast.

So a reminder again, as we've been doing at the end of each of these, there are three candidates on the ballot. If you are a registered Democrat anywhere in the town of Brighton, you can vote early. It's the 14th to the 22nd of June for early voting, and the early voting location is not where we've gotten used to, at the Empire State College, where the town offices now are temporarily. It's across the street over at the at the Winter Farmers Market building.

And then regular voting will take place at your regular polling place on June 24th. And if you're like me in Electoral District 4, that's moved this year for us, too. So keep an eye on those postcards and make sure. Thank you so much for being with us.

[Clara]

Thank you so much.

[Scott]

Been a pleasure talking with you, and I know whatever happens. We're going to see a lot more of you going forward.

[Clara]

I'll still be here.