

[Scott]

Welcome to the Better Brighton podcast, a short-term endeavor where we take the opportunity to do what the mainstream news media don't right now, which is to cover what's happening in Brighton. I'm Scott Fybush. I was a journalist at WXXI, and before that with R news, for over 20 years. Joining me for this episode of the podcast, one of the three candidates running for two seats on the Brighton Town Council, Robin Wilt! Welcome!

[Robin]

Thank you so much for having me, Scott!

[Scott]

So glad you could do this with us. So a few of the ground rules that are going to be the same for all of the candidates, and just to make sure that this is all out there from the outset. So, first of all, we have not provided any of the candidates with any questions coming into this. It is a free-form discussion. All the candidates have agreed, anything goes. We're going to sit here for an hour or so and we're going to have a conversation. The only editing that we're going to do on it is just technical if the dog starts barking in the middle of it, or if my teenage film crew that's in the other room making a movie disturbs us. We'll edit those bits out, but otherwise, basically anything goes for the next hour, uh, by way of disclosure. Also, I should say that I have no formal role endorsing anybody. I'm not a formal journalist anymore. I should say that. At points I have said, and I will say this again, that my wife, Lisa, and I were very active in the fight for saving the town pool last year, and I have said, and I will say it again, that we are very appreciative of the work that you did in particular on town board for making sure that we found a way to keep the pool saved.

[Robin]

Thank you.

[Scott]

Against some opposition, I will say. Also, in terms of full disclosure, that my wife hosted a comedy night at your house the other night, in which I performed. It is in no way a formal endorsement, because really, I don't think my endorsement means anything to anybody, but we'll put that all out there.

[Robin]

Well, it certainly means something to me.

[Scott]

For the most part, this is not supposed to be about me. This is an opportunity really to get to know each of these candidates, to get some of the facts out there on the table, to get some questions answered that float around. So let's start with the same question that I'm going to ask our other incumbent, Christine Corrado, which is as an incumbent on the town board, you've been there now for several terms. How do you assess your accomplishments? What can you point to that you have accomplished, and what do you hope to further accomplish if you're reelected?

[Robin]

Thank you so much for the question, Scott. And again, thank you for hosting this series of forums. I think it's really important to meet the candidates in an unstructured and open environment. And thank you for providing that for our community.

[Scott]

My pleasure. Welcome to my dining room, by the way. We are doing this extremely informally. There is no formal studio here. We're literally sitting at my dining room table. Okay,

[Robin]

So I've served on the town board now for going on eight years. And I think some of my core accomplishments are some of the things that all of us are running on as candidates. Namely, I was the progenitor of the inclusion, diversity and equity advisory board. We started out very inclusive. Anybody who expressed an interest in being on the board, they were automatically appointed to the board, and so we started out with 18 members, which was good because at the time we were working on the inclusion, diversity and equity action plan, which now has been adopted by the full board, and we are in the implementation stage. This plan does not just sit on a shelf. We evaluate our processes on a regular basis, when we come up with policies that are going

to lead to better inclusion, diversity and equity within our community.

So that's kind of my signature accomplishment and an outgrowth of the inclusion, diversity, and equity action plan was, of course, hiring the region's only chief diversity officer at the municipal level. And that is Miriam Moore. And she has worked tirelessly to bring us more cultural events, especially at our Brighton Farmers Market on a regular basis, and just raise awareness about the diversity in the town. And also, Miriam has started a series of town talks where we highlight different members of the community, and talk about their experience in the town of Brighton. I think it goes a long way towards humanizing all of us and making our stories available to the broader Community.

[Scott],

These are fraught times for that topic right now on the national level in a way that they weren't, I think, when this all started. The town obviously depends to some extent on funding from higher levels of government. How vulnerable is that right now?

[Robin]

Well, this is a moral commitment for the town. So we don't intend to walk back from any of these areas. We intend to continue to maintain a chief diversity officer, continue to improve in terms of our DEI (diversity, equity and inclusion) experience within the community, We have not as yet become a target of the federal government, but I think it's important to say that it is our job at the municipal level to protect those members of the community that may be targeted by the federal government. Town government is the form of government that is closest to the people, as our supervisor likes to say. And so we have made a commitment to ensuring that all members of our community feel that our town government is accessible, and that the services that we provide are available to them.

[Scott]

So let's talk about one of the questions that came up. I, as you know, put this out on the Brighton Facebook groups and said, what questions do people have for the candidates? And one of the questions that has come up repeatedly is this issue of communication. Because I think there is a sense out there, certainly. I sensed this when the fight about the pool began last year, that if you weren't reading Connections magazine, which is not really an official organ of anything, you never even really knew that they were going to get rid of the pool and replace it with a splash pad. And there's a sense out there that I think people still feel like they want more communication from the town. And I know there was some talk at one point about naming a communications director. Where do things stand? What's your assessment of how well the town does and doesn't communicate with residents about what's going on?

[Robin].

Well, I think that there are definitely areas of improvement. Things that I have done on the town level to try to improve the communication is I implemented the "Council Member On Your Corner" program. So, there you have a time at one of the community's iconic places, the farmers market, to talk to your council members, and they're dedicated to being there and answering questions. We highlight different topics, usually things that are changing on the town level.

Again, we need to come into the 21st century in terms of our communication. I've noticed that on the Monroe County website, they have a means to sign up for communications from the county, and it's an opt-in. And I know that our school district does something very similar, so I don't think that's beyond us at the town level. And then we could come up with some talking points, even if it were just highlighting when our public meetings are. I think that would go a long way towards improving communication with our residents. You know, people lead busy lives, and it's easy to miss what's going on at the town level. Even though we do put our meetings on YouTube, and we make every effort to communicate with the community, there are definitely areas of improvement. And I think making that information available on demand without people having to go look for it – in other words, you know, you just sign up, you get a notice, and you can go and browse at your leisure and see what's happening in the community.

[Scott]

And those committee meetings again, as we learned with the whole fight over the pool, the committee meetings are really where most of the business gets done, and they tend to be sort of these weird weekday morning things that limit the number of people who can get to them. Is there a way to improve that?

[Robin]

You know, we obviously like to have staff on hand during our committee meetings, and it's easier during business hours to have the staff available for those meetings. So the tendency has been to have those during business hours. And we know that is a barrier to attendance for a lot of people who work a 9-to-5 job. I think that's why it's so important that we make the information available and make those agendas available in advance, so that if people notice that there's something on there that's of importance to them, they can attend.

And so, while I don't want to promise anything in terms of making those meetings at different times, they do tend to be workshop meetings, when we do discuss the items that appear on our town board agenda in detail. At the same time, just to have access to staff. But that segues to kind of why we had some of the miscommunications that we experienced, right? We do get very good staffing, but I think when it came to the pool, and the town hall renovation in general, we were in deep discussions with staff about the needs of of the staff when as the employees they were working at the facility, but we weren't really looking at town. And so we weren't engaging all the voices necessary to get the full gamut of feedback regarding the changes that were happening at town hall, and that's really unfortunate.

[Scott]

You know, I think, as a Roselawn resident in particular, sitting over here on Bonnie Brae, there are still a lot of questions that I think aren't completely answered, by a lot of the people in this neighborhood who back up to town hall, about what exactly is going on, how much parking is going to be added or taken away, where is everything actually going to be situated. Is there a path still to improve that level of communication as this project continues for another year and ia half.

[Robin]

Yeah, and there is a blurb on the site where you can get updates on the town hall renovation project in particular. Obviously, we talk about this in our public works committee meetings as well, and we give updates in our finance and administrative services committee meetings, and we touch on it in our community services community meeting. Basically in every single public meeting that we have, we talk about progress at the town hall. Because it is a recreation center, it is a public works project, there's public safety aspects involved. There's a lot going on in in the facility.

We're also are going to be highlighting town hall renovation project at one of our "Council Member On Your Corner" sessions this summer. We'll also be talking about the assessments, which I feel was another area where communication...we hope to improve, but I think really having people opting in to regular communications in the town, where they could get a preview of what we're discussing, would go a long way towards having better informed people.

[Scott]

Is the town fully compliant with open meetings law right now, as far as posting agendas and minutes?

[Robin]

Yes. and we, of course, strive to maintain compliance with open meetings laws, but I think we go above and beyond in a lot of cases. The requirements aren't that rigorous, quite frankly.

[Scott]

I mean, there are obviously a few of these elephants in the room, and one of them has been this assessment issue. Because I think it is not an overstatement to say that a lot of people were blindsided by these notices. And then I think there was a feeling, too, and this gets back to the communication issue, that then there wasn't a lot of clarity about what went wrong, how much ended up getting spent on this and what the outcome of all of this ended up being. Are all of the staff involved, even still with the town? And what's your perception of what happened?

[Robin]

There has been some stock changeover following the aborted assessment reassessment. But I think, again, because we were one of the hottest ZIP codes in the country in in 2022 – 14618, that was the hottest ZIP code in the country. And then this year we see that 14623 is the hottest zip code in the country. So this is a desirable place to live. And so we see rapidly escalating home prices, particularly because of the low inventory. Nobody's leaving. We see very few houses available on a regular basis sometimes.

If you're talking about just Brighton Central School District, the number of available houses, you can count on one hand. So it is, to a large extent, it's supply and demand issue. The lower the supply, the greater the demand we have, almost auction-bidding-type wars in terms of purchasing homes, and that leads to rapidly increasing home valuations.

Now, the thing is, a lot of people are not looking to move. We have historically high interest rates right now, whereas most people you know, refinanced their mortgage debt a number of years ago at closer to three percent interest rate. Now we're looking at seven. So now a lot of people [don't have] incentive to move right now, looking at that assessment value, at reassessment value and saying, well, it really doesn't matter if I can get that amount of money for my house if I put it on the market because I have no intention of putting it on the market. And then, of course, if everybody were to put their house on the market, that would not be the value of the property.

So you know, there are a lot of different nuances that are being weighed here. And as a real estate worker myself, I understand how much the market has appreciated. and then just from a diversity and equity standpoint, it is more equitable for the community to have the houses valued at their market rate as opposed to having them so far behind, where our equalization rate is, 62 percent right now. And that dis-serves – not really the high-end properties, but more the median and lower-price properties. That's always a concern for us. We want everybody to be assessed at their fair market value and not have these wide disparities because people taking advantage of, senior benefits, VA benefits, they won't achieve top dollar for those benefits unless we are assessed at the correct value.

[Scott]

Definitely we're getting into the math weeds here.

[Robin]

I'm sorry, I tend to get wonky on this stuff because it is my area.

[Scott]

But again, it comes back to the communication issue. These explanations I think sometimes of, OK, just because you were valued at 200, it went up to 400, doesn't mean your taxes will actually double. It feels like a lot of that wasn't clearly communicated, and then it feels like everything was just kind of pulled back quickly. What happens next? Where does this process go now?

[Robin]

Well the reassessment was budgeted over the 2025/2026 timeline. So that money is available in the budget still. We definitely expended a portion of those dollars in the aborted reassessment, but we intend to reassess at some time in the future. That time has not been identified as yet. But, again, for those reasons of equity, we really do need to eventually assess properties at the value that they're worth.

[Scott]

And in the meantime, the existing assessments stand?

[Robin]

Yes, the 2024 rolls will be your assessed value for this year.

[Scott]

Let's move on to a few of the other big topics that I know people are kind of looking for answers. And I think one of them obviously that we have to talk about is the issue of endorsements by the Brighton Democratic committee. And again, I will put my my biases, such as they are, out on the table here, which is that I am a huge fan, and I've said this very publicly, of small D democracy. I think ultimately it should be up to voters to have as much choice as they can possibly have about who is going to represent them.

We should point out that when you go into the voting booth on June 24th, or if you go for early voting, which starts a few weeks before that, that when you look at that ballot, you pick two out of three, Up to two out of three. So, regardless of who's on what signs, or who's been endorsed by whom, it is, ultimately, the voter's choice. And that's why I wanted to do this, is to provide this opportunity independent of any of these formal endorsements, to get all these voices out of there.

That having been said, obviously, you have been endorsed by the committee in the past. You have been at odds probably more so with our supervisor than most of the other town board members over the years. What is your assessment of how the Brighton Democratic Committee is functioning what service it does or doesn't provide to the town with these endorsements, and what it should mean to voters?

[Robin]

First of all, I just want to describe, uh, for people, what the membership on the committee is and bylaw by election law. It is like one percent of Democrats in the community, so that's how many polices we have on the, uh, on the committee. So, it is a very small and elite group. Our supervisor referred to them as the grass roots of the community. They are really the political elite of the community. And the Democratic lead for the Brighton Democratic committee is the wife of our supervisor. Which raises a spector of all sorts of conflicts of interest and whatnot. Um, but it is what it is, uh. And, and yes, I do think because of some of the positions I've taken that are contrary to the supervisors, and you, you know, I'm not in his good graces right now. My concern with all of this, and we've seen the level of autocracy at the federal government level and I am concerned about autocracy at the local level. Because what we have right now is our town executive, the supervisor who is deigning to select members of the legislative branch, the Town Council. And if we have the executive so literally hand picking? His legislative body. There is not going to be any distance between the executive branch and the legislative branch. There's no autonomy, and we have autocracy effectively. So that's my concern, um? You know, ultimately, it will be up to the voters. I do hope that we're able to get our message out effectively, and I do think that the vast majority of Democrats still believe that they value my service to this community, and they believe that I can continue to be an effective leader. But again, I want to emphasize that it's important right now that we do have those dissenting voices.

When it comes to protecting certain communities from the federal government who is going to do that most effectively, those who are willing to stand off to the autocracy at the local level or those who are beholden to the autocracy at the local level.

[Scott]

Talk a little bit about autocracy, because obviously, you know, we are all of us seeing what is happening at the federal level, and I don't. I don't want to go overboard and drawing parallels between what we're seeing in Washington right now. You know, and what's happening in town, where I think everybody basically, you know, has a common path that that they're moving along? It is very different from what's happening in Washington, but you know there's certainly are issues that that have arisen?

Are communicated, I think, this comes back to this communication question, too, about you know is this is this weird that we have a town supervisor who mostly reads complaints on Facebook only from certain people? You know, expand on that a little bit from, from your point of view, from being more inside of this. What do you see?

[Robin]

Well, obviously, it has been my experience as well, but when we have disagreed, the supervisor shuts me out, and that is no way to lead. I think it's important that we give voice to all opinions, dissenting or otherwise. And, um. I, I think it's incumbent on leadership to ensure that they engage with as many stakeholders as possible and get as many different perspectives as possible, and that has kind of been a hallmark of my service to the community, really, um, elevating those voices that we may not have heard, for whatever, reason. And, um, so? I, I think. That as we look at the federal level where really any type of dissent any type of disagreement is, they're attempting to quash. Um, you know, we're deporting people because they wrote editorials. Um, I, I think it's especially important to safeguard our civil liberties on the local level.

[Scott]

Okay, let's talk about some other local issues because there are a lot of questions that came in. Uh, on these Facebook threads on the on the various Brighton, parents and neighbors, and moderated parents and neighbors. Uh, so a couple of the other questions that have come in and again. These are questions that I that I'm going to end up putting, um. To all of the candidates.

I would love to hear candidates talk about the community services that Brighton offers versus other towns and how we can increase our offerings. Whether it's the library, the pool, Rec classes, community meeting space, the list goes on and on. Where are we in Brighton? I mean, we're not at the level of like a Perinton or an Irondequoit

right now in terms of those services, right?

[Robin]

I think it's critically important that Brighton improve its recreational infrastructure, um, right now. We lease a facility we have been leasing it from the Brighton Central School District. Now, we lease from the Talmudic Institute, and there are certain drawbacks and not having those abilities under your control. Um, definitely. We've seen drawbacks in terms of maintaining the facilities, keeping the infrastructure up to date. And so we would like to see expanded recreational services, and we did have a study, a community survey, that was conducted a couple years back to get feedback from the community about the priorities that they had, and I will say that a pool was among those priorities.

Um, and, but we have not seen the finalized version of that the study yet, um, or that has not been released to the public and. And so, I think it's important that. Even though, even while we improve our home at Town Hall, we're looking ahead to really engaging the public on the issue of recreation for facilities that are important to them, so yeah, It's disappointing that we do not offer better recreational sites in Brighton, and I think a lot of people feel that way. One of the things that we were fortunate to get is a congregate programming grant from Monroe County. And we were able to put that towards lunches for seniors, because right now we do not have the facilities to make hot lunches for seniors, and so it's good that we got the grant funding for that, but again, we can't always rely on on grants from the county or, and especially now as federal level, maybe some from the state. It. It's really important that we prioritize our recreational offerings. I think I think it's one area where we might be lagging behind our peers.

[Scott]

Is that ultimately Buckland Park where that would end up you think?

[Robin]

I think that's the this where we have the most space and opportunity. Yeah.

[Scott]

Okay, some other questions, uh, that came up. Our town is so challenging to navigate when homeowners want to renovate and improve their properties, while other properties sit and rot completely, completely neglected and uncared for. And I know, we've seen, you know, some of these properties that do kind of sit there. And I know, having gone through the process? Having done an addition to our house and having done the garage, I mean, Brighton does not have a reputation for making that easy. Is there a way to improve that while still maintaining all the things that you want to have a town code?

[Robin]

Well, I think one of the challenges is that we have not updated our town codes, uh, in a long time. I joke that our town codes are older than most Millennials, so you know if you have a 40 year old code base you can't take newer types of ideas into consideration. Um, a lot of them happen to be energy based, so if you know, somebody wants to do something innovative. With regard to solar, we don't allow groundbound solar. For instance, if somebody wants to build an accessory dwelling unit. We really don't have provisions with our code to accommodate that, so I, I think it's important that we examine our code and really bring it up to date, and I think that will make things a lot easier. And also, as we build for climate resilience. It's important that we have codes that allow that aren't antiquated with regard to our energy infrastructure, right? We, you know, we are, we shouldn't be so far forward as we build trails and make the, uh, Town more bike accessible and walking and pedestrian accessible. It's important that our codes reflect that shift.

[Scott]

Which brings us to another issue, which is Monroe Avenue, and there is. definitely a sense that came up in the comments about a lot of vacancies along Monroe Avenue about a lot of properties that probably aren't really the highest or best use for that land. What's what are your thoughts on on where we've come? So far, I mean, I know that there, you know, there have been design studies. I know that, uh, there's going to be some sort of road diet coming for Monroe Avenue, that will hopefully give some more in the way of bike lanes and better sidewalks, and all of that. Where are we going with that? That core part of the middle of town?

[Robin]

Well, um. That is our core Town core, and I think it's important that again we develop for resilience and

sustainability along our town, our main town corridor, and that was one of the reasons that when we apply for an infrastructure Improvement and Jobs Act Grant specifically, the enterprise efficiency and conservation block grant. These were grants that were made available through the IIJA, which was passed just before the IRA Inflation Reduction Act. But these were locked grants. They were depending on the demographics in your communities, so socioeconomic level, you were given a certain amount of money, and so we were. Brighton was allocated 76 thousand dollars, which gets us a start towards rezoning, and um, updating our zoning codes, and and that's what we allocated the grant funding for again in light of sustainability and climate resilience than this we felt was was a priority at the time. We thought that was going to intersect really well with the Monroe Avenue improvements in road diet, however, um, you, you know, State DOT has kind of pushed that project back. And, um, we're probably going to get the IIJA funding prior to that. But still, I think it's important that even in keeping with our comprehensive plan. The Vision Brighton 2028 plan, we look at denser development, a little bit, more mixed-use development. Putting people in the location of where they shop commercially, I think, would improve a lot of business prospects along the Avenue.

[Scott]

Which would in turn increase the tax base and help help remove some of the burden on residential taxes too. Any idea on a time frame at this point? Like, for that road diet, are we talking two years? Three years, we're talking?

[Robin]

2028/29

[Scott]

Okay, so still still a ways out.

[Robin]

Still a ways out, you know? Unfortunately, our friends on the Pittsford side of Monroe Avenue are probably going to, I think, get their road improvements prior to us. But, uh, you know, hopefully they'll be worth the wait.

[Scott]

We will continue to wait. A couple other things. You knew, obviously, that that we're going to have to touch on some of these things because you have you have been something of a controversial figure. It's no secret in in Brighton politics. For a whole lot of of both good and bad reasons, and I want to kind of dig into that a little bit. We are a little more than halfway through our hour talking with Robin Wilt here on the Better Brighton podcast, and to kind of dig into that a little bit, because you know, it seems to me a lot of the issues that have kind of drawn you into criticism aren't necessarily a lot of these "Hey, let's deal with zoning and potholes and and code Improvement." They are, they are bigger issues. So, first, kind of big picture, I mean, how much do you think voters who go to the polls in the town of Brighton should be considering a candidate based on their views on larger geopolitical issues versus hey, you're gonna get my pothole fixed and my crosswalk painted.

[Robin]

My geopolitical views are largely shaped by my commitment to human rights. And I don't think I, I think that transcends jurisdictional level. Probably the reasons I I fight for so hard on the local level to make sure that every voice is included is because of my commitment to human rights on a grand scale. But I, I do. I will say that I am the most experienced candidate in this race. I am the one who has served the longest. I am the one who has been associated with the most, uh, electoral groups, like Elected Officials To Protect America, Local progress. You know, the list goes on and on. I make it a point of being engaged, not only on the local level, but on the national level. And, um, so some of these issues do arise. Where we are, you know, as a group of elected officials taking stances on issues that are not considered local issues, but are more Global issues. And I don't think that should make me a controversial figure. I think as long as we're standing up for the human rights of everyone, it should not be controversial. And I, I think that's what I do.

[Scott]

And yet, we've seen, I mean, for instance, you know, there was. There was the debate over. The new rules on protests at 12 corners, and there are certainly I mean, I can see a lot of valid arguments on both sides of this, and I, I completely understand people are concerned about what their kids see and hear as they are coming back from school. You know, it is a town that historically, obviously, has had a very large Jewish population and and still does, especially in terms of an active voting block. And I mean, these are obviously incredibly fraught issues. You voted in this case against this particular ordinance,

on again, what I see, you know, seeing both sides of this as being very valid Free Speech grounds too? Lay that out for me about what your thought process was and why you think that was the right answer to to this question.

[Robin]

Well, again, thank you for asking this question because I think it's important that people realize that every single one of your town board members really delved into this personally and did a lot of research. We worked hand in hand with our town attorney, attorney to the town. And we looked at a lot of case law. And some of the case law that I couldn't get over was – this is protecting free speech – is, you know, a particular case out of Manhattan, actually Harlem, where a certain group was denied the ability to protest in a certain place. They said, yes, you can protest, but you have to go to this different location, and they argued before the Supreme Court that they weren't able to reach the audience, the intended audience.

And they won. They won because, you know, the Supreme Court felt as they did that their free speech rights were restricted. And there is a component of this law, this permitting law, that now does not give you the opportunity to protest at the 12 Corners Park with unfolding events or current events, you know, spontaneous protests that unfold with regard to current events, and I think that makes the law fail on its face. Um, obviously this has not been tested, but I do think eventually the town will be tested. And ultimately, we are stewards of the town, right? And it's important that we do not pass legislation that runs afoul of the Constitution, because that opens the town up to liability.

And when it comes down to the reason why we were implementing the law, the permitting law, they weren't really met by the scope of the law, um, you know? If you talk about prior notice, well, there was prior notice of these protests. People knew that the protests were coming. So those protests would not have fallen under the permitting code. The number of people that attended were fewer than the threshold number that is required for a permit. So if we're trying to address a specific problem, this permitting law fails on its face.

And I, I think it was disingenuous really, to argue that this was a safety issue. Really, people did not like the speech that was being put forth, and it's when you start governing whose speech can be aired in the public forum is again when you get into fascism, and I think it's really important that we resist any attempts to curb our Free Speech rights.

[Scott]

And it's a tough thing. I mean, I completely understand the level of sensitivity that exists around it. Um, you know, the level of vulnerability that some of these communities in town feel, and I guess you know, as long as we're getting all the way into this here, there is also the criticism that I know you have heard, of "Oh, Robin Wilt is anti-semitic." Address that.

[Robin]

Honestly, I can't tell you how many tears I've cried over this because this has been, as somebody who has been known throughout this community for standing up for the human rights of everybody, it has cut to my core to be accused of anti-Semitism, and I think that has been a criticism that has been leveled in order to get me to stop talking about certain issues. Which is not fair, and um, you know, I understand that I'm a public figure, but I'm also a human being, right? And you know, I don't think it's wrong to stand up. You know, human rights are not a zero-sum game. We can support human rights from one group, and it doesn't detract from human rights from another group.

[Scott]

Or at least it shouldn't.

[Robin]

Right, it shouldn't. And um? And and, and I think being outwardly supportive of Palestinian human rights should not draw a lot of vitriol and ire. I think we should be supportive of everyone's human rights without exception. And that is the way that I've conducted myself, and I know it upsets people because Palestinian human rights have not had a strong voice in this country. And that's one of the reasons why I think it's so important that we as public figures make sure that we're standing up for the most marginalized among us.

[Scott]

Last question on this topic, and then we will move on. The photo that you took with Linda Sarsour I know has come in for some criticism. Would you do that again, given the opportunity, given the controversies?

[Robin]

You know what I? I think that people do not even realize the context in which that photo was taken. You know, if you know me, you know I'm a progressive, you know, I was a staunch supporter of Bernie Sanders. I was the only Bernie Sanders delegate to the 2020 Democratic National Convention, the only elected delegate from this region. And that photo was taken on occasion of statewide securing enough signatures on the to get Bernie Sanders on the ballot, and so we had a big press conference down in New York, I took pictures with staff of TeachOut, with Jumaane Williams, with several progressive leaders – Brad Lander. You know, it was a big celebration. And Linda Sarsour was among the people I took a photo with. And she was also a delegate to the DNC, so this was really...we took some pictures with several people who were contending for Congressional seats that year, uh, three women of color.

And you know, it's interesting, because at first when I posted the picture, nobody knew who she was. It's only after I provided a little context saying, this is who she is. She had been nominated as one of Time's 50 Most Important People of the Year that year. I think it's through a twisted narrative that this has come to be viewed as some form of anti-Semitism to just be taking a picture with another political figure, particularly one who is aligned with progressive politics.

[Scott]

Let's get back to some local issues. We have about 15 minutes left as we're talking with Robin Wilt here. You have run in the past for higher office. What is your take right now? We've talked a little bit about the Brighton Democratic Committee. What is your sense right now of where we stand within Monroe County and within New York State and within the Democratic Party. Whether or not you're reelected, what is next for you in terms of trying to push these issues forward on those levels?

[Robin]

Yeah, well, I mentioned wide openly during this podcast that I am a progressive, and one of my goals has been to create a larger tent within the Democratic party. I think that the Democratic party, uh, skews towards, um, establishment and moderate voices, and I think it's time that we let particularly younger voices into the party. Make sure that they have a leadership role. We saw what happened with David Hogg at the national level. Um. I don't think it's sustainable for us not to include younger generations in this process. And the Brighton Democratic Committee, like most Democratic communities, skews older. It does not look like the demographic that it represents, and I think it's important to have voices such as mine that are really bringing those different voices to the table. Those who might not represent the majority opinion, but nonetheless, it's important that their voices are incorporated into our overall platform and political goals.

[Scott]

We should mention, too. You're also on the Working Families line.

[Robin]

Yes, I am.

[Scott]

In addition, you're in charge of the town party, right?

[Robin]

Um, no, no, I'm not in charge of the town party. I'm endorsed by,

[Scott]

You're endorsed by. OK, we'll get that clear. What role, I mean, it's tricky in an election where the Democratic primary tends to kind of be the whole race. And certainly the form is wide open. I don't even know if anybody's running on any other tickets this year.

[Robin]

Um, you know, there's no primary on the Working Families line, and there tend not to be primaries on those lines because you have to get a special permission to run on those those lines. They really want somebody who's aligned with their values for the most part, unless you're a judicial candidate, then you can get on there just with signatures.

[Scott]

Fusion voting.

[Robin]

Ah, yes, fusion voting.

[Robin]

I'm on the Working Families party line because my values align with the Working Families party when it comes to people-focused policies really. Making sure that housing is a human right, that health care is a human right, that we are focusing on the marginalized voices that don't always have a seat at the table. That party tends to align with my values, and so it was values by our position, and to seek their endorsement. And I'm very proud to hold it.

[Scott]

Will you keep running actively on that line if you don't end up winning the Democratic primary?

[Robin]

Not likely.

[Scott]

It's a tricky thing in a one-party town.

[Robin]

Yeah, it's a tricky thing in a one-party town. I think it's important to hold that line for those voters who won't necessarily vote for somebody out of Democrat. People are disillusioned with the Democratic party, make no mistake. I think that there have been failings on the part of the party in terms of really standing up for those voices who have been targeted by this administration, and flowery speeches are not going to do it. We really need to resist autocracy in terms of policy, in terms of...in the courts, I signed on to I don't know how many amicus briefs, public letters in opposition to this administration's ridiculous policies – trying to get rid of habeas corpus, trying to get rid of birthright citizenship, and these are all things that, while they don't seem to affect us locally, I can tell you that there are people who are directly impacted on the local level.

[Scott]

It's an interesting perspective. Let's talk a little bit, we've got about about 10 minutes left here, for people who don't know you well, and unfortunately, this is a campaign that, if Brighton history is any indication, will probably get a little more ugly in the next month or so, which is again, part of why I want to do this is to try to counter some of that, and get some some even-handed discussion. But for people who don't know you very well, you're not a Brighton native, but you are here by choice. Tell me a little bit about what brought you here, and what makes Brighton special to you and to your family.

[Robin]

Yeah, well I am native to the area. I grew up a little bit east of Brighton in Pittsford. And I don't know if that's gonna hurt my chances, if I should really disclose that. But yeah, so I am a native to the area. I have spent time in other communities. My husband is in the tech industry, so we spent a good deal of our adult life in the Seattle area. He worked at both Microsoft and Amazon, and so, I think that gives me greater perspective. So when it did come to choosing where I wanted to be, and again, I grew up a little bit east of here, but I chose Brighton, in part because of the diversity. I didn't want my kid to be the only Black kid in the entire second grade in Jefferson Road Elementary, which was the case with my niece. And so, the fact that our town values diversity, that one of the pillars of our community is sustainability, these are all things that align with my core values, and that's one of the reasons why I'm so honored to serve in this community. We have a very engaged electorate, which I think is out of character for many towns in in Monroe County. So it keeps you on your toes. It's an intellectually stimulating job, which I love. I wouldn't live or govern anywhere else.

[Scott]

You have a new college graduate in your family.

[Robin]

Yes, I do. Yes, I do. My youngest just graduated, so I'm on the other side officially, which is kind of crazy to me. That time really does go by quite quickly.

[Scott]

It absolutely does! What is the worst part of the job?

[Robin]

Oh, gosh. You know, I'm not a patient person. So really, dealing with the pace at which you can implement change on the government level can be frustrating at times, because you go in there with these grand visions. I mean, even for the pool, right? It's like the town hall renovation projects was like 24 months, and that's for the first phase. And then we have phase two and phase three, and so we're looking at, you know, 2027, before we actually complete the project.

For somebody who doesn't have a lot of patience, it is grinding, But I wish that really, I could get to know every single person. Because being a public figure on the local level, people hear things about you, but they don't reach out to you. And I'm somebody who is extremely accessible. Like, literally, my cell phone is published everywhere because of my industry, and so I wish people would just pick up the phone and talk to me, as opposed to getting a thirdhand expression of what I am.

[Scott]

How do we avoid – I mean, we've seen some of this ugliness in past races. What are your thoughts? We've talked about the importance of free speech, and obviously people have a very extensive First Amendment Right during a campaign to put a lot out there. How do we improve that? How do we make this process work better so that people in Brighton feel like they're getting an honest campaign and electing people who they know that are going to serve them well.

[Robin]

Well, I think money out of politics. Unfortunately, I don't think it's something that we can solve on the local level. I think this is probably above my pay grade. You know, what we see is that some of the problematic mailings have been coming from independent expenditure committees, which are groups that basically can spend almost unlimited funds as long as they don't coordinate with the campaign that they're promoting. And they can say whatever they want, but because there is that not that coordination, often you see miscommunication, you see things that are not accurate being put out there into the ether. So you know, really listen to your neighbors. Listen to local voices. Listen to me. Interact with candidates directly. I think that's the best way to keep our elections fair and honest.

[Scott]

And there will be a League Of Women Voters forum coming up, I think right about the time these get posted, yeah, June 2nd.

[Robin]

Yes, June 2nd.

[Scott]

And where's that? Where's that taking place?

[Robin]

That is going to be virtual. It's going to be on Zoom. I think they've had a lot of success with that format, so they're going to continue it.

[Scott]

Question that keeps popping up, and I forget if it was moderated parents and neighbors, or just parents and neighbors. But we just had this little bit of town political drama about tree removal, and the question has popped up several times. Where do you stand regarding revising the existing tree removal procedure, because we've seen this one guy who had the tree that was growing up next to his driveway and felt like it took longer than it should have.

[Robin]

Yeah, and I do think that process can be streamlined. Right now it goes to our committee meeting. It's already been through the vetting process of our conservation board, and the arborists and the tree council. So, having that additional step where it goes to a meeting that only occurs once a month and then has to be referred to the

town board from that meeting, I think it can add, you know, a couple to three months to the overall process. And it's not really unnecessary because I have not known the public works committee to ever refuse a recommendation that was made by the tree council and the conservation board, so that additional step seems like red tape that could be abandoned.

[Scott]

So are things like this fixable, and how?

[Robin]

They are fixable. At our last public works committee meeting, we talked about removing that additional step so that we're just going to amend the process. We can do that in our capacity, it's town board, And so that it's more streamlined and people can get additional action quickly.

[Scott]

Okay, final question because we are down to our last couple of minutes. If you win re-election to another term, how do you get past whatever tension might exist with not having gotten the endorsement, and with the supervisor to some extent. You know, a lot of times, you are the one vote against on a board. That is, that is a 4-1 vote. How do you get past that and still work to make things happen?

[Robin]

Well, ultimately, we are serving this community in order to meet the needs of the community. And I think if everybody prioritizes that, we can work together. It's unfortunate that we're in this place where disagreements have led to political smears. And really, trying to marginalize members of our community just trying to express themselves and give voice to their needs. And so I'm going to continue to do what I always do, which is engage with everyone, regardless of what personal opinion is, and if everybody can continue to behave without animus, I think that we can move forward effectively.

[Scott]

Robin Wilt, thank you so much for taking the hour to talk with us. I appreciate it again. There are three candidates on the ballot. This is, we should note, also a little unusual because you're running for a three-year term instead of four because of the change in state law that's still being contested about when these elections take place, so we will be right back in the fray of this again next year, and so there will be a lot of opportunities, hopefully, to keep doing this. But again, you are one of the three on the ballot. People have the opportunity to vote for up to two. You're arguing, perhaps, to vote for just one.

[Robin]

(Laughs) Well, we are all running against one another, and I know that as the most qualified. I hope that people will support me.

[Scott]

All right. Robin Wilt, thank you so much

[Robin]

All right, thank you.