

Responses of James Walkinshaw, Braddock District, JamesWalkinshaw.org July 19, 2019

Watershed Questions to Fairfax County Supervisor Candidates – 2019

1. Resource Protection Areas and floodplains delineated along our streams and rivers are designed to limit erosion and protect our citizens from flooding. Yet these undeveloped protected zones offer a tempting target for developers hungry for low-cost alternatives to redeveloping in built-up locations. What can Fairfax County do to maintain protections along our waterways intact?

Development must be kept a safe distance from our streams and waterways and RPA policy is key to ensuring that we do that. Under the Chesapeake Bay ordinance, building within an RPA requires an exception. From my perspective, those exceptions should be granted only in rare circumstances. The recent case on Woodlark Lane is a good example of when an exception should not be made and I applaud the members of the ERC and the Board of Supervisors for sending a strong signal about the importance of our water quality. As the effects of climate change worsen, we need to do more to ensure that we are not building in flood prone areas.

2. Conservation corridors permit genetic flow of flora and fauna species between habitat areas, helping to prevent localized extinctions. What can Fairfax County do to preserve and enhance conservation corridors on county property, in county projects, and on private property?

NCRC's Conservation Corridor Map is a wonderful tool to guide is in protecting and expanding conservation corridors across Fairfax County and Northern Virginia. With respect to conservation corridors, my priorities will be to ensure that future development is sensitive to the maintenance of existing corridors and that we treat our green infrastructure just as we treat our built infrastructure -- as a key resource that requires consistent investment and maintenance.

3. Fairfax County recently adopted the Fairfax Green Initiatives to address climate change. Yet every day, trees, Nature's simplest carbon sequestration device, are sacrificed in favor of asphalt which increases heat island effect. This is often done in the name of other environmental goals, such as bicycle paths or stormwater ponds. What can Fairfax County do to reverse the trend of tree cover loss?

As Braddock Supervisor, I will work closely with our Tree Commission and seek their guidance on the preservation and planting of native trees and vegetation. Under Gerry Connolly's leadership, the Board of Supervisors implemented a 30-year Tree Action Plan in 2007, with a goal of increasing Fairfax's tree cover to 45% by the year 2037. New technologies for measuring tree cover suggest that that goal was too modest and in 2015, 57% of the county's land area is covered by tree canopy. The same study identified 9% of the total land area that is currently impervious and potentially suitable to converting to tree canopy.

4. In 2012 Fairfax County successfully sued the EPA to prevent implementation of a proposed TMDL (Total Maximum Daily Load) plan to reduce sediment and erosion in Accotink Creek. A revised TMDL plan for Accotink Creek was approved in 2017. How can Fairfax County avoid further delay and move forward with meaningful actions to return Accotink Creek and similar impaired streams to health?

Saving and protecting Lake Accotink is one of my top priorities, but we have to look at the Lake as part of the overall watershed. I'm excited about the pending TMDL, even given the reduced scope due to the lawsuit. I see it as an opportunity to engage the community in a collective effort to improve water quality, especially with respect to chloride. As Braddock Supervisor, I will help to lead that effort.

5. Fairfax County is pursuing a program of stream restoration projects to reduce stream erosion. Yet the cause of the erosion lies not in the streams, but in upland built-up areas. How can Fairfax County directly address the excessive runoff from paved surfaces that is the prime cause of stream erosion?

Decades of unchecked development with little or no stormwater management requirements has put us in a challenging position with respect to runoff and increased sedimentation. We must continue to ensure that new development meets the highest possible standards and work to retrofit older developments built under previous regulations.

6. The future of Lake Accotink is being decided now. Sediment buildup from excessive erosion is accumulating in Lake Accotink at a rate that will require either costly dredging projects every 15 years or the removal of the dam, allowing the sediment to pass downstream. What is your position on the future of Lake Accotink?

Saving Lake Accotink is one of my top priorities. It is a vital community resource and the County's only lakefront park accessible to underserved communities in and around the Beltway. I'm optimistic that we can find a solution that saves the Lake, improves water quality, and is sustainable long-term.

7. Streams in Fairfax County are plagued by accumulations of immortal plastic trash that originates on paved surfaces and flows down storm drains. Can Fairfax County lead by example by eliminating single-use plastics at county facilities and functions? What other solutions do you envision?

Yes, believe we can lead the way by eliminating single-use plastics at county facilities.

8. Fairfax County is collaborating with Virginia Department of Environmental Quality in developing a Northern Virginia road salt management strategy to reduce salt contamination of aquifers, streams, and drinking water. What steps can Fairfax County take to address this issue?

Fairfax County should lead by bringing together community organizations, the private sector, DEQ, and the EPA to create a salt management strategy that is a model for the entire Commonwealth.

9. When is the best time to plant a tree?

A – Now

B – 20 years ago

C -- All of the Above!

Braddock District:

The Braddock Road Project proposes to eliminate roadside tree cover in favor of asphalt multi-use paths and also proposes to realign Danbury Forest Drive through a stream for the purpose of intersection realignment. Can you comment on the trade-offs being made for this project?

I believe our default option for paths and trails should always be natural surface, especially in environmentally-sensitive areas. But, in some cases, including along major thoroughfares like Braddock Road, a natural surface trail would likely be impractical. While public projects like the Braddock Road improvement project are not subject to Chesapeake Bay ordinance RPA restrictions, we should still seek to minimize impacts. I'm familiar with the environmental concerns related to the Danbury Forest Dr realignment and would ensure that they are given significant consideration in the process moving forward.

◆ **Think about your watershed as a candidate asking voters to put our future into your hands.** ◆

Friends of Accotink Creek

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