

Questionnaire for the 2023-2025 City Council and Mayoral Candidates

TO: Fairfax City Council and Mayoral Candidates

FROM: The Fairfax Environmental Forum and Friends of Accotink Creek

We applaud your decision to run for office. This election provides an opportunity to set the direction of the City at a critical time. As City leaders you will be in a position to choose a path forward that will nurture a rich and diverse ecosystem that provides sustenance and even joy to all who live in the City. This vision is not new:

"Guiding Principle: In 2035, Fairfax is a city with... a healthy ecosystem of naturally flowing streams, native plants, wildlife, contiguous natural habitat areas, and a healthy tree population." [1]

***"Fairfax should be a city in which human activities are integrated into the natural environment in such a way that both are accommodated."* [2]**

We believe that the City needs leadership that will recommit to this vision and has the fortitude to reconsider business as usual practices that affect the City's natural environment. One of the City's primary responsibilities is to steward the land and streams within our borders. Each question addresses a component of that responsibility. We don't expect you to be a subject area expert but we are asking for your vision, your creative ideas and your commitment to substantive actions. Many decisions you will make during your time as councilmember or mayor involve these issues. Your responses will provide an opportunity for voters who are concerned about the environment an opportunity to assess your willingness to be a steward and advocate for the natural environment in the City. In addition, we are happy to share responses and ideas with our growing coalition of concerned citizens and post them on social media as appropriate. The sooner you can respond the sooner we can share (and give you credit for!) your good ideas for the City. Thank you!

[1] **2035 Comprehensive Plan Natural Environment Section**

[2] **2020 Commission Report**

1. Trees are Nature's simplest carbon sequestration device, but they are sacrificed every day in favor of asphalt. Even when done in the name of other worthy goals, tree loss is real and cumulative and results in compounding the impacts of climate change. The Comprehensive Plan commits the city to protecting its trees. What will you do to reverse the trend of tree cover loss?

Comprehensive Plan Outcome NE1.4

<https://www.fairfaxva.gov/home/showpublisheddocument/12382/636867034235100000> pg 107

2. Invasive Plants are rapidly overtaking our woods. They crowd out native species and make access a struggle for both citizens and wildlife yet the City does not have a plan or staff in place to address this growing problem. What is your strategy for ensuring we have staffing, public outreach, and professional removal to stem the tide of invasive plants?

Comprehensive Plan Outcome NE1.4

<https://www.fairfaxva.gov/home/showpublisheddocument/12382/636867034235100000> pg 107

3. Resource Protection Areas (RPAs) and floodplains help to protect our streams and reduce the impacts of flooding on built areas. Yet in recent years Council has approved projects that encroach upon and even destroy these protected areas. How will you use your leadership position in the City of Fairfax to maintain and enlarge these buffers that protect the headwaters of the Accotink and Pohick Creeks and reduce flooding impacts?

Comprehensive Plan Outcome NE1.1

<https://www.fairfaxva.gov/home/showpublisheddocument/12382/636867034235100000> pg 106

4. Urban Runoff is eroding our streams. Under the TMDL plan for Accotink Creek, the City has a program of stream restoration projects to stabilize stream banks and manage flow. However, the source of urban runoff is the water from our roads, driveways, walkways and roofs, which gets collected into our stormwater pipes and from there piped directly into the streams. What will you do to reduce runoff throughout our city?

*See: https://www.accotink.org/2017/Vol_II_Final_SED_TMDL.pdf

Comprehensive Plan Outcome NE1.1

<https://www.fairfaxva.gov/home/showpublisheddocument/12382/636867034235100000> pg 107

5. The stormwater utility is a new funding mechanism approved by City Council for meeting the state and federal requirements to reduce the impacts of storm water on our streams and ultimately on the Chesapeake Bay. The stormwater utility charges a user fee pegged to the amount of impervious area on each lot, much the way our water meter is used to charge us for the amount of potable water we use. As presented to Council by staff and our financial advisor, Davenport Public Finance, the stormwater utility provides the City with an innovative mechanism to leverage money to fund its stormwater management program in a fiscally responsible manner. Unfortunately, many residents mistakenly believe that the stormwater fee is a tax being imposed on them and see it as an additional financial burden. How will you communicate to citizens the overall fiscal impact of the stormwater utility and how do you envision it being best used to serve the community's needs?

6. Road salt contaminates our streams, aquifers and drinking water. The Virginia Department of Environmental Quality has recently developed a Northern Virginia road salt management strategy to reduce salt runoff and an Accotink TMDL for salt. How will you reduce the use of road salt in the City?

Link to DEQ Salt Management Stakeholder Advisory Committee:

https://www.accotink.org/2021/SaMS_Toolkit_Summary_final.pdf

7. Light pollution impacts wildlife by disrupting mating, migration and feeding patterns of many species of birds and insects. It also takes away citizens' joy of viewing the heavens and the displays of fireflies. While the City has taken some initial steps, such as using dark sky compliant fixtures in some locations, very few people are aware of the environmental costs of lighting up the night. How can you use your leadership position to ensure the City reduces its contribution to light pollution (such as 'Dark Sky' lighting, removing lights, and insect-friendly wavelengths*)?

Comprehensive Plan Outcome NE2.2

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* More about Dark Sky Lighting here: <https://www.savingourstars.org/#milkyway>

More about insects and light wavelengths here: <https://www.selux.com/int/en/extended/insect-friendly-lighting>

8. Plastic trash that litters our roads and trails is washed into our streams with every rainfall. How will you use your leadership position to help the City eliminate single-use plastics at City facilities and functions? What other solutions will you propose to address this community-wide problem?

Comprehensive Plan Outcome SI1.3

<https://www.fairfaxva.gov/home/showpublisheddocument/12382/636867034235100000> pg 111

9. Natural Landscaping, involves foregoing fertilizers, herbicides, and pesticides that are detrimental to soil health, wildlife, streams, and the Chesapeake Bay, using native plants, and reducing lawn areas. Many practices will need to change to transition to natural landscaping methods. What strategies will you use to transition the City's land management policies to natural landscaping? How will you encourage private landowners to do the same?

Outcome NE1.4.3; NE2.2

<https://www.fairfaxva.gov/home/showpublisheddocument/12382/636867034235100000> pgs 107-108

10. How will you use your leadership position to provide effective funding and expertise for the new Urban Forestry Program and environmental responsibilities of the City in general?