



Sierra Club-Potomac River Group City of Falls Church Candidate Questionnaire 2023 City Council Election

The Sierra Club is considering endorsing candidates for the upcoming City Council election in the City of Falls Church. Our endorsement is nonpartisan; we have no party affiliations and encourage all candidates to support a pro-environment policy.

This questionnaire is an essential part of our candidate endorsement process. As a City Council member, you will be responsible for regulating and upholding the environmental laws in Falls Church, as well as influencing ordinances that affect the environment. Your responses to this questionnaire along with an in-person interview will be the basis of our endorsement decisions. These questions give you the opportunity to express your opinions, values, and knowledge regarding environmental protection and conservation. Your responses will not be shared beyond Sierra Club leadership without your permission.

Please complete this questionnaire and return it by August 25, 2023, to Michael Trauberman and Dean Amel.

Personal and Campaign Information

Candidate Name: [Letty Hardi](#)
Occupation: [Vice Mayor, City of Falls Church](#)
Email:
Phone:
Campaign Address:

General

List your top three environmental priorities for Falls Church and describe what specific measures you will take to achieve them if elected. Are these priorities and proposed measures being highlighted as part of your campaign?

[As transportation and buildings are the top contributors to GHGs, I support a pragmatic approach in Falls Church’s environmental priorities that is weighted towards those areas as reflected in the now adopted Government Operations Energy Action Plan \(GOEAP\) and the underway Community Energy Action Plan \(CEAP\). I will continue to highlight the city’s responsibility to be a good environment steward and change agent for the environment as key priorities in my campaign - not just in policies but also past budget decisions and votes I’ve cast. A sustainable city is a core part of my vision for Falls Church and my top 3 environmental priorities are:](#)

1. [Reduce energy use and support energy transition from fossil fuels to renewable sources in buildings and transportation - specifically, retrofit existing buildings, set standards for new buildings, and shift mode share by continuing to invest in bike and ped infrastructure.](#)
 - a. [While municipal buildings/transportation make up only 3% of the city’s GHGs, I am proud to have a hand in our new high school which is net zero ready \(and more with the addition of solar panels soon\) and City Hall and Library renovated to be LEED Silver several years ago. We should look to retrofit other city buildings as renovation/modernization of systems are scheduled and continue the green fleet transition.](#)
 - b. [Our Environmental Sustainability Council \(ESC\) also has recommendations for us around RECs and PPAs to move the city to more renewable energy which I’d support.](#)
 - c. [For the private sector, while we’ve set a new high bar of LEED Gold in new commercial/mixed use buildings, we have the opportunity to adopt green building standards for new commercial buildings. We’ve begun by negotiating for electric only appliances in the most recent special exception approval and green building standards are in the current City Council work plan. We](#)



Sierra Club-Potomac River Group City of Falls Church Candidate Questionnaire 2023 City Council Election

- can encourage private homeowners to “green” their homes via energy audits, improving energy efficiency, electrifying systems, weatherization, etc.
- d. On the transportation front, the city has a role in providing options and infrastructure that make it easier for residents and visitors to be less auto-centric - investing in sidewalks, bikeshare, bike lanes, transit and first/last mile connections, and lowering the barrier for adoption of EVs via ideas like more charging stations - all of which we’ve increased funding in our budgets, have been in our work plans over the past 6-8 years, and as a result we’ve delivered on projects like Dual Trails of the W&OD, Capital Bikeshare, new sidewalks, crosswalks, ADA ramps, bus shelters. I also take pride in specifically advocating for sidewalk-specific funding in our operating budgets and efforts to reduce “missing links” in our sidewalk network, which are now a standing item that is funded every year. Yet there remains more to do as the transition from a car-centric 1950s suburb to a more walkable/bikeable city is slow and costly.
2. Improve the city’s resilience to climate change - as we are already dealing with the effects of stronger and more frequent extreme weather events, continuing to invest in upgrading our stormwater infrastructure and protecting and expanding our tree canopy will help the city improve resilience to climate events.
 - a. While the City Council has funded and prioritized the “Big 6” gray infrastructure projects underway with bigger and newer storm pipes, I believe green infrastructure projects that slow down/reduce runoff and improve water quality merit attention as well. I look forward to seeing the first green infrastructure plans in the Greening of Lincoln project.
 - b. I’d also love to see stronger upfront policy changes for residential redevelopment. On an annual basis, by-right residential redevelopment impacts far more land (as small single family homes are replaced with larger homes) than changes in our commercial corridor. While we already have adopted the most stringent residential tree canopy requirements allowed in Virginia (20% canopy in 10 years), I’d love to see a more progressive policy that slows down the increase of impervious surfaces in our neighborhoods and reduces clear cutting of mature trees, as mature trees help reduce runoff. For example, our neighbors next door in Arlington County have adopted a 3” of stormwater retention requirement for residential redevelopment and I’ve advocated for our city staff to consider a similar ordinance in the current City Council work plan.
 - c. Urban forest - we are proud that we have one of the highest tree canopies in the region at 46% and our leafy tree lined streets are a defining feature of Falls Church. Our best measurement of tree canopy also shows that it’s actually held steady if not grown, contrary to common belief, even with new development in our commercial and residential neighborhoods. That said, we shouldn’t rest on our laurels. As the liaison to the Urban Forestry Commission since 2021, I’ve encouraged that board to recommend the city adopt tree canopy and green space % standards for new commercial developments so we set an appropriately high bar for future projects vs rely on negotiations via the Special Exception process. That work is now underway by the UFC.
 3. “Smart Growth” - a loaded and buzzy term, but early on, I’ve learned that one of the best things we can do to support the environment is to encourage appropriate density and transit-oriented development where there is existing infrastructure, transportation, jobs, good and services in order to reduce exurban sprawl and traffic congestion - which in turn reduces GHGs. As Falls Church is designated as a regional activity center, we have a continued responsibility to welcome good development and housing growth for the region. I would support this kind of growth in future comprehensive plan updates, small area plan updates, infrastructure planning, and City Council work plans.
-



Sierra Club-Potomac River Group City of Falls Church Candidate Questionnaire 2023 City Council Election

If you were to receive an endorsement from the Sierra Club, how would you use it?

If I were to receive a Sierra Club endorsement, I'd leverage it in my campaign materials, events, my [website](#), [social media](#), etc.

Government Operations Energy Action Plan

City Council recently adopted the Government Operations Energy Action Plan (GOEAP). https://fallschurch-va.granicus.com/MetaViewer.php?view_id=2&clip_id=2373&meta_id=123875. Do you support the goals the GOEAP sets forth for City government to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions by 50% by 2030 and to be carbon neutral by 2035? To what extent will you support the strategies and actions outlined in the GOEAP that are needed to achieve those goals? Do you see areas where you believe the City government could do more to lead by example?

Yes, I voted to support the GOEAP when it was in front of City Council this past summer and offered comments during the City Council's public hearing. I've learned in 8 years as a member of the City Council that it is important not only to adopt policies, but they need to be followed up with action and budget support. As such, I wanted to make sure both the GOEAP and the CEAP were both sequenced, discussed, and approved in time for the upcoming FY25 budget cycle so we can follow the plans with dollars to implement the recommended actions. I've supported previous budget amendments (and the idea of having GOEAP and CEAP so we'd have a clear roadmap to accomplish our GHG targets) that are funding the work of both plans so far.

One of my comments from the GOEAP adoption meeting is encouragement to consider a simple, easy to understand yet ambitious goal - such as "city operations to be carbon neutral by 2030" - that can be rallying cry for city staff and the community that we're leading by example and go beyond discussion to real action. I also encouraged greater emphasis on the schools' role in GHG reduction - as they are the majority of energy consumption and emissions in the city between the bus fleet and school buildings.

On that note (a somewhat controversial idea probably among fellow school parents) - while electric school buses are better than diesel powered buses and a worthwhile investment we've made, I'd actually love to see more of our students walk and bike to school, use Metro buses that run in town already, use micromobility, and reduce our reliance of school bus transportation. The budget dollars towards buses, maintenance, and operations of buses could be better spent on bike and ped infrastructure and increasing Metro bus service - both of which would serve a population broader than our students.

Community Energy Action Plan

City staff are developing an action plan to reduce the community's greenhouse gas emissions. <http://www.fallschurchva.gov/2141/Community-Energy-Plan> What greenhouse gas emissions reduction goals do you support for the community by the years 2030 and 2050? What specific actions do you believe the City should prioritize in order for the community to achieve those goals? What resources should the City government provide to help the community achieve those goals?

I support the city's adoption of the MWCOG's GHG emissions reductions goals for 2030 and 2050 and view the city as having a key role in supporting and encouraging our residents and businesses to play an active part. As I've had the opportunity to provide input on the scope of the CEAP (and GOEAP above) while on City Council, the ideas shared in the town hall and the likely forthcoming draft are ones that I will support! :)



Sierra Club-Potomac River Group City of Falls Church Candidate Questionnaire 2023 City Council Election

Similar to my responses above, I support a pragmatic yet analytical approach in the city's role in reducing community's GHGs - ie, what is the most cost efficient and impactful use of city resources to meet the regional goals? Again, given that GHGs primarily come from buildings and transportation, I'd bias towards prioritizing those areas.

For residents and businesses - with the passage of new federal legislation and tax credits, there is an opportunity to build more awareness and understanding and help to navigate the tax credits available. This could be supported by the city and/or civic groups like FCCAN. That can help spur homeowners to pursue weatherization, electrification/upgrades to heat pumps, solar arrays, etc. Also - as half of the city's housing stock is actually now in multifamily buildings, targeted outreach to the large corporate property owners with advice or encouragement to green their buildings offers "more bang for our buck" vs individual homeowner outreach. An equity lens is also important here - for low income households and small businesses, monthly utility bills are a larger share of monthly expenses and as such, energy inefficient buildings are a bigger issue. I'd like to see the city offer more targeted support to individuals and/or buildings that serve low to moderate income families.

Again - on the transportation front, I support actions that help individuals understand their outsized role in GHG reduction simply by reducing their dependence on cars. Paired with accelerating the city's bike/ped infrastructure delivery (sidewalks, bike lanes, crosswalks, HAWKs) and continuing development that provides more retail/commercial/services that can meet a household's daily needs without a car (a la the 15 Minute City) especially in the post-Covid/remote work reality where downtown commutes are less common - we can help the community meet the GHG goals.

Finally, there are a number of smaller actions that the city can encourage the community to take on, despite their impact on GHGs being much smaller than the items above. I still include them because I think it's important for individuals to feel agency and contribute to such a monumental goal like stopping climate change. Small actions like reducing solid waste via recycling and composting, street tree planting, rain gardens, habitat restoration can help at a very local, neighborhood level and are still worth doing.

Zoning

For 2024, the City Council work plan includes consideration of amendments to the Zoning Code to allow greater flexibility for accessory dwelling units in residential zones, and other measures, to expand the availability of housing. What would be your top priorities for those amendments?

Yes, I support the legalization of accessory dwelling units and more diverse housing types. While they may not be "capital A" affordable like subsidized, inclusionary-zoned affordable housing, smaller and middle forms of housing are naturally more affordable than large single family homes. We need more options beyond single family homes and multifamily apartments, which are the only forms of housing we've allowed to be built in the city the past 20+ years. In general - increasing housing supply, especially more diverse housing stock, better allows us to meet our values and vision to be a more inclusive community with racial, socioeconomic, and generational diversity (seniors can age in place, kids can return home) and also a more economically and environmentally sustainable one. A few specific priorities and considerations:

- I would like to see the city look at other communities that have successfully adopted and amended their code to allow more diverse housing types and learn from them vs re-create the wheel. For example,



Sierra Club-Potomac River Group City of Falls Church Candidate Questionnaire 2023 City Council Election

across the US and in Northern Virginia, our neighbors have evolved their ADU ordinances over time and we should take advantage of their head start.

- We adopted a new cottage housing ordinance during my first term of City Council and now have a vibrant, thriving Railroad Cottage project, winning national and regional awards for its innovative concept - one of the first cottage projects on the east coast. I'd love to see more cottages in the city, so we should seek to understand why the market is not building them and update the ordinance to encourage future projects if needed.
- A key nuance I've learned from other jurisdictions tackling housing diversity is that the total impervious surface for the existing house + accessory unit (or duplex, quadplex, etc) should not exceed what is allowed to be built by-right already. For example, we have a 30% building lot coverage limit in Falls Church currently and new residential developers often build to that max due to high underlying land costs. If we were to allow different housing forms such as ADUs, duplexes, quads etc, the 30% building lot coverage limit should remain which means there should be limited change to impervious surface, stormwater runoff, and other environmental impacts than what is already happening by-right.

City Council recently granted First Reading to proposed updates to the T-1, Transitional District in the City Zoning Code and referred the proposed changes to the Planning Commission for review and recommendation. The updates seek to facilitate redevelopment of smaller infill properties between higher density business districts and lower density residential neighborhoods and to promote environmental sustainability. Do you support the proposed updates to the T-1, Transitional District?

https://fallschurch-va.granicus.com/MetaViewer.php?view_id=2&event_id=2036&meta_id=124155

Yes, I also support the T Zone modernization effort. In 2021, as we were anticipating several large mixed use developments breaking ground across the city - I advocated for new zoning mechanisms that could encourage smaller scale, infill development, especially to create more diverse housing, without going through the special exception process that can be cost-prohibitive for small developers on small sites. A more interesting city and better urban design is one with a mix of heights, densities, buildings, and uses - ie, not everything should be large, multi-acre, 8 story buildings. That was the genesis of the T Zones work.

While it's been 2+ years in the making, after much community input (24 public meetings and counting - contrary to rhetoric, the current proposed code has evolved to incorporate community feedback we've received), heavy staff work, market input - I believe we are close to a code update that meets those original goals and encourages smaller scale development and densities that fits in the scale of a transition district, adds environmental protections where there were none before such as tree canopy requirement and impervious coverage limits, appropriate building envelope parameters (building height, setbacks, stepbacks, lot coverage, etc), modest reductions in parking requirements. I am hopeful that those requirements are balanced with enough flexibility to elicit market interest that we haven't seen in T Zone sites.