

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

Candidate Name: Tim Stevens  
Occupation: Retired (formerly in telecommunications)  
Email:  
Phone:  
Campaign Address:

GENERAL

Reducing greenhouse gas emissions in our City is my top environmental goal. Through our participation in MWCOG, we have adopted targets, including 80% reduction by 2050 and 50% reduction by 2030 (below 2005 levels). The City is currently in the process of developing a Community Energy Action Plan which will enumerate steps the City needs to take to reach our goals. Invariably these steps will involve reducing emissions in buildings and transportation, given that most emissions come from these sources. I look forward to supporting this plan and making it a priority for the City's workplan.

The City has taken some actions to reduce emissions, including implementing a program to convert all streetlights to LED, begin conversion of the City vehicle fleet from internal combustion to electric, require new developments subject to Voluntary Concessions negotiations to use all-electric appliances and designing a new net-zero emissions high school, with installation of a roof-top PV system to occur this year. I have helped with achieving these steps and would be a constant voice on council to follow through to achieve further progress.

Implementing the approved recommendations of the Community Energy Action Plan will require budget actions, which I will support. Continued collaboration with other jurisdictions is a priority for me, whether focusing on regional or state issues (I used to represent Sierra Club Virginia Chapter on COG/CEEP). It is particularly important for a small jurisdiction like Falls Church, which lacks the staff and resources of larger jurisdictions, to work with others to achieve environmental goals. I will encourage such collaboration.

My second priority is support of urban designs that make it easier for residents to live their lives with reduced reliance on vehicles. Many actions lead to this, including support of mixed-use projects that enable our residents to shop, dine work and enjoy entertainment locally, without the need to drive to other places. Support for improved bicycle infrastructure helps this goal, as does support for micro mobility and improved sidewalks. Our City has made good progress in this area, as reflected in our low per capita greenhouse gas emissions, but more needs to be done.

A third priority involves my intention to support local environmental programs such as improving tree canopy, sustaining curbside composting, encouraging use of native species, pursuing improvements to recycling, etc. These programs affect our quality of life.

My campaign website ([stevensforfallschurch.com](http://stevensforfallschurch.com)) describes my many voluntary efforts over the years to improve our local environment. Given my years of association with Sierra Club (both at state and local level), I would be honored to receive the Club's endorsement, and would use it both on my website and other media efforts.

#### GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS ENERGY ACTION PLAN

The City's energy plan (GOEAP) was recently completed, and adopted by our City Council. I spoke in favor of the plan at the public hearing preceding Council's vote. The emissions reduction goals for city government are in line with the overall goals the City has adopted. While achieving the 50% reduction goal by 2030 will be challenging, it may provide motivation on the need for focused attention to take action.

The plan lays out a succinct set of strategies which can be followed by staff. City Council will need to monitor progress and call on the city manager to provide routine updates. If elected, I will be calling for such progress reports, and will move to intervene if progress appears stalled.

A significant share of emissions reduction is projected to come from improvements in grid electricity (complements of VCEA, which I supported) and

purchase of RECs/PPA (I helped launch the City's participation in the EPA Green Power program). These sources rely heavily on cooperation among neighboring local jurisdictions, which is why the first strategy - collaboration by the City with others - is crucial. I would actively support such collaboration. Our Dillon Rule status means that action at the state level is necessary to help support achieving our local objectives.

Other strategies, such as coordination of energy control systems, fleet electrification, installation of rooftop solar, etc. will not only reduce emissions, but will result in efficiency savings for the City. They are basically components of good governance which itself is an important goal.

I appreciate recognition of the need for an interdepartmental staff team to meet quarterly to review progress towards the City's emissions goals. We used to have such a team (called the "Green Team") which was unfortunately discontinued after the 2009 recession. I will routinely ask about the status of this effort.

The City could lead by example by installing and showcasing renewable energy systems, such as solar on the Community Center, or a solar canopy over portions of the City Hall parking lot. Like the electric charging stations installed at City Hall, these systems would be a visible reminder to our residents of the need to take action.

## COMMUNITY ENERGY ACTION PLAN

This plan is still in development. Our recently organized Falls Church Climate Action Network (with grant funding provided by the Potomac River Group, thank you very much!) is reviewing how to engage as many of our residents as possible to support a robust plan aimed squarely at achieving the emission reduction goals (50% by 2030 and 80% by 2050, below 2005 levels).

Since most emissions come from buildings and transportation, these are the areas that should receive the most emphasis in the plan. I would like to see the City develop financial incentives for people to improve the energy efficiency of their homes, convert appliances from gas to electricity, purchase electric vehicles, install rooftop solar, etc. With correct pricing signals, individuals are more likely themselves to take on the actions needed to reduce emissions.

Supporting mass transit is an important tool not only to meet the transportation needs of those not owning vehicles, but for reducing emissions as well.

Jurisdictions in northern Virginia need to work more intentionally to ensure the success of Metro and the launch of Bus Rapid Transit. I will support such efforts.

## ZONING

Housing supply in recent years has fallen below demand, causing significant escalation in the price of existing housing. Restrictive zoning laws have made it difficult for new housing supply to be constructed. As a result, many new residents are forced to look for housing in distant suburbs, leading to higher emissions from transportation (and the constant call for expanded highway infrastructure to meet their needs). The environmental consequences from these trends are detrimental, placing upward pressure on greenhouse gas emissions.

Action on the need to expand housing supply can take various forms, but one of the easiest steps is to expand the ability of homeowners to construct accessory dwelling units. The City does allow a limited form of ADUs, but it is time to expand the options. Arlington has worked through several iterations of an ADU ordinance which Falls Church should consider copying. I have toured several ADUs in Arlington which are very attractive and respectful of neighbors.

The City is currently considering modifications to its Transitional Zones. The code for these limited sections of the City were adopted in the 1950s, and were aimed at commercial projects/uses that have been in decline for years, as evidenced by the lack of development in these parcels. Council identified T zones not only as opportunities for revitalization, but locations for diverse housing options such as townhouses and smaller scale rental and ownership types. The latter is important given that almost all new housing in the City recently has been either renovated single family homes (at a very expensive price level) or rental units in large multi-family projects. There is an urgent need for smaller housing units that can be priced at levels accessible to larger segments of our population, especially younger persons getting started with home ownership.

I support Council's goals and have worked to find a consensus solution for code changes that would enable more diverse housing types to be constructed. I also

support changes to the code that would establish tree canopy requirements (the current code has none), limits on impervious cover (the current code has none), as well as building parameters that fulfill the goals of protective transition from business to residential zones. I also support the goals of our Environmental Sustainability Council, including their recommended provisions to make buildings EV and solar-ready. The difficulty of implementing these provisions is further indication of the need to achieve more flexibility via state legislation, which I very much support.