



Sierra Club Remains Neutral in 2018 Arlington County Board Election

by Dean Amel

Several decades ago, the Sierra Club changed its nonprofit status so that it could get involved in political issues and campaigns. As a result, the Club is more active in political campaigns than most other environmental groups. In addition to working on a wide variety of legislative issues at the national, state and local levels, the Club also endorses candidates at all three levels of government.

Sierra Club decisions on endorsements for Congress and state legislatures are made by the national office and by state chapters. However, one of the functions of a Sierra Club Group like the Mount Vernon Group is to look at local elections and determine if candidate endorsements are warranted.

When the Mount Vernon Group Executive Committee evaluates candidates, the focus is on environmental issues, ranging from renewable energy to transit options to affordable housing. With this in mind, our Group ExCom sent questionnaires to Arlington County Board candidates John Vihstadt (I – incumbent) and Matt de Ferranti (D) with the objective of endorsing one or the other in the November 2018 election. Both candidates were interested in the Sierra Club's endorsement and both were generous with their time.

After reviewing the candidates' questionnaire responses and interviewing them, we found both candidates to have positions and qualities that we felt were positive and worthy of support. In the end, however, we were not able to come to a consensus in support of one candidate.

Over the years, our Group ExCom has tried to operate by consensus. As ExCom membership has changed over the years, we have continued to work together and respect differing opinions among ourselves. We believe that consensus is particularly important when making endorsement decisions, which by Sierra Club rules require two-thirds support from both the group executive committee and the Virginia Chapter political committee. It is in this spirit that no endorsement was made. The positive aspect of this is that Mr. de Ferranti and Mr. Vihstadt are two good candidates for the environment, meaning Arlington is in a good position to move forward on environmental initiatives regardless of the election outcome.

The questionnaire we used for the Arlington County Board 2018 general election will be posted on our website at a later date. Candidate responses are kept confidential by the Sierra Club to

prevent misrepresentation, because interviews with candidates that help explain positions are also part of the endorsement process.

We encourage all eligible citizens to register to vote and to cast their ballots this November.

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