



Your Vote Needed: Mount Vernon Group Elections

Members of the Mount Vernon Group (residents of Arlington, Alexandria, Falls Church, eastern Fairfax County and eastern Prince William County) are eligible to vote in the annual election to select members of the group's Executive Committee.

This year we have five candidates for five open positions. After reading the candidate statements below, please use our [online ballot](#) to cast your vote.

If you would like to receive a ballot by U.S. mail, contact Rick Keller, MVG Chair, at rkeller49@verizon.net.

The deadline for voting is January 10, 2020.

Steve Banashek | Brian Hires | Rick Keller | Carolyn Lyle | Rob Swennes

Steve Banashek:

I joined the Sierra Club in 2017 while working with the Ready-for-100 campaign in Alexandria and am currently a member of the Mount Vernon Group Executive Committee serving as the Transportation Chair. I focus on transportation electrification and while I primarily advocate for Alexandria to electrify their vehicle fleets including the DASH municipal bus and ACPS school bus fleets I also work with advocates in other Virginia jurisdictions to help them encourage transportation electrification in their locales. In Alexandria I advocated for the recently updated and approved Environmental Action Plan to include strategies and targets for electrifying the city fleets. I also organized an Electric Vehicle (EV) display at the 2019 Alexandria Earth Day event where attendees could view and learn about EVs. My other areas of interest include electric utility regulation and policy including changes that need to be made to support transportation electrification.

Brian Hires:

I am a lifelong advocate and communicator for environmental and social justice issues, as both volunteer and professional, for diverse conservation groups, foundations and the federal government. After receiving a master's degree in media studies and climate communications from CU Boulder, I moved to Alexandria, Virginia in 2015 to work for the US Fish and Wildlife Service as a spokesperson and strategist on Endangered Species Act, climate change and wetlands issues.

Prior to that, I served as a communications consultant for Western Conservation Foundation and Rocky Mountain Wild in Colorado. In this work I created and executed groundbreaking campaigns that brought together agricultural, sportsmen and environmental groups for the first time ever on behalf of wildlife, climate change, public lands, renewable energy and natural resource solutions.

I first got my start working on environmental and social justice issues at Wetlands Environmental Activism and Social Justice Center in NYC. Through direct action campaigns with diverse groups such as Rainforest Action Network, Forest Ethics and Endangered Species Coalition, I brought accountability and change to unsustainable practices and policies of local/state governments and global corporations.

As a volunteer with Sierra Club Virginia, I have worked with the Mount Vernon Group on behalf of the Ready for 100 Campaign and aggressive climate and clean energy action by Alexandria. My ongoing focus is on the nexus between local, state and regional climate solutions and innovative, scalable strategies and tools designed to build a sense of community and efficacy among concerned citizens.

Rick Keller:

I have been a Sierra Club member for about forty years and active in the Mount Vernon Group since 2006. I currently serve as the Group Chair and have been involved in the Arlington Ready for 100 campaign since its inception. As Chair my role has also been to consolidate requests coming to our local Group from the State Chapter, national Club, environmental partners as well as members and help coordinate Club activities to respond to those requests. I also initiated our membership in the Arlington Chamber of Commerce, an experiment in working with our business community.

My involvement in our Group provides me with a place where my personal commitment to a safer, healthier future can take root in environmental activism. There is a lot of work to do and I would like to express my appreciation to local Club members for their hours of work on Climate and other issues. I look forward to continuing to expand our cadre of local activists and move the needle forward to achieve our environmental goals.

Carolyn Lyle:

Hello, my name is Carolyn Lyle and I live in Alexandria. I am interested in joining the Mount Vernon Group Executive Committee because I have been active with the Sierra Club Ready for 100 campaign in Alexandria since 2017 and active with the Virginia Chapter of the Sierra Club as the Equity Volunteer Lead since 2015. I have been a member of the Sierra Club for at least 10 years.

As the Equity Volunteer Team Lead, I worked with chapter staff to develop the first chapter Strategic Plan for Equity and Environmental Justice. We set annual goals and implemented several educational programs throughout the commonwealth about the concepts and necessary skills as articulated in the strategic plan. I continue to work with chapter staff and other volunteers on the Equity and Environmental Justice goals of the current chapter strategic plan for 2024.

My activity with the RF100 campaign is to host meetings, send follow up notes, network among persons and identify together both short term and long term activities. This involvement has morphed into organizing a group of Alexandrians for supporting, promoting and tracking the Alexandria Environmental Action Plan 2040.

I believe that there is much potential in the MVG and I look forward to exploring and identifying those opportunities to stop climate change, increase conservation and infuse the concepts of equity and environmental justice in those environmental priorities.

Rob Swennes:

I am completing my ninth two-year term as a member of the Executive Committee (ExCom) of the Mount Vernon Group. Thanks are due to others in the Group's leadership who spend many hours each month ensuring that the Group functions well and tackles the key environmental issues in the region.

I serve as Secretary to the Group and also handle membership matters and new volunteers. I have some responsibility for the Group's announcement listserv established so that the members of the Group can get more timely reminders of upcoming Club meetings, socials and action activities. (Have you subscribed to the listserv? Information on subscribing is on the Mount Vernon Group web site under the sublink Group Announcements. Or simply go to <https://www.sierraclub.org/virginia/mount-vernon/join-group-announcement-listserv>)

I am active in civic matters in Arlington. I worked for many years with the Washington Area Bicyclist Association and the Arlington Bicycle Advisory Committee. I have chaired the County's Transportation Commission and its Neighborhood Conservation Advisory Committee—the latter being a unique program to conserve and upgrade our traditional neighborhoods rather than let them deteriorate and be later terraformed into something new and unrecognizable.

I've been actively engaged in trying to give people in the county and others in Northern Virginia access to the Potomac River for nonmotorized recreation (rowing and paddling). This can be done in an environmentally responsible way that will also give many more people a better understanding of how our river ecosystem functions and how it can best be protected.

But the bulk of my time over the past 9 years has been spent in establishing and managing community-based farmers markets in the Northern Virginia area. I'm fully committed to the locavore movement and to our regional farmers and local food producers!

If reelected to the Executive Committee, I will continue to pursue these initiatives and others to improve the quality of life in Northern Virginia.

This content originally appeared in the December 2019 issue of the Mount Vernon Sierran, the Mount Vernon Group's quarterly newsletter. For more information about the Mount Vernon Group, please visit virginia.sierraclub.org/mvg/.