

2020 Questionnaire for Newport News City Council Candidates
For the York River Group of the Sierra Club

Please answer the following questions, expanding your responses as much as desired. Return to Tyla Matteson, email: tmatteson1@mindspring.com by Friday, April 3, 2020, midnight.

Special note: Due to the restrictions from coronavirus, we will not hold a candidate forum. Instead, we plan to post your responses on our Sierra Club website in order that our members and also the general public may view them.

Thank you for your participation.

Global Climate Change and Energy Solutions

1. The Sierra Club rates climate change as a top priority, and encourages cities, towns, and counties to adopt measures to reduce greenhouse gas emissions (GHG) to avoid its most severe impacts. As we all have observed, these impacts include sea level rise, more severe storms, longer droughts, melting of ice caps, and increased illnesses transmitted by mosquitoes and ticks.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) issued a stark warning in their 2018 report that we must not exceed a warming of 1.5 degrees Centigrade. The countries of the world must reduce their emissions to avoid the worst ramifications, setting in motion conditions which could not be reversed. They advised this must be done by 2030, only 10 years away.

An important step to reduce GHG emissions is by first establishing a base line inventory.

The City of Newport News made a commitment to set up their inventory and action plans to reduce emissions, good for the earth and good for cutting energy costs. They have on staff sustainability coordinators and a sustainability team. In October 2017 Newport News initiated an internal energy advisory team, where staff members from many city departments meet quarterly to discuss how to reduce energy consumption and implement an energy audit, with the belief that the city cannot manage what it cannot measure.

Will you continue to empower the city staff, along with citizen members of the energy team, to educate the residents of Newport News on ways to lower energy usage? Absolutely! The best to get our citizens to understand the importance of protecting our environment is through sustained educational opportunities.

Has a baseline inventory been completed, measuring the city's present energy usage? I am not aware if an inventory has been completed but will surely be a priority for me when I'm elected.

Recognizing that Newport News has taken a lead on addressing climate change, will you work to keep your city as a model to neighboring jurisdictions? When I was a member of the city council from 2012-2016 it was a great honor to have received several awards and recognitions in regards to environmental issues and climate change. I pledge to make sure climate change and our environment stay a strategic priority of the council.

Will you support sufficient funding in the city budget to carry out the sustainability program? Yes

2. We are witnessing a pronounced sea level rise in the Hampton Roads area, second only in the US to New Orleans. There are important efforts underway in Hampton Roads to adapt to sea level rise with major capital investments. Unfortunately, adaptation cannot keep up with rising seas unless we begin to reduce carbon pollution significantly. Over 200 localities across our nation, large and small, have pledged to transition to 100% renewable energy by 2035 or sooner.

In Virginia, these include Arlington, Alexandria, Richmond and Portsmouth.

<https://www.sierraclub.org/ready-for-100/mayors-for-clean-energy>

Will you support the City of Newport News in developing a plan to move to 100% renewable energy by 2035, using programs like Ready for 100%? Absolutely Yes

3. Commercial Property Assessed Clean Energy (C-PACE) is a program to help finance investments in energy efficiency and renewable energy through the savings in energy costs.

This program can pay for heating, cooling, solar systems, insulation, and more for a wide array of commercial buildings, such as offices, apartment buildings, places of worship, and health care facilities. A number of localities in Virginia use the program, as well as localities across the nation. Below is a link to explain this program.

<https://vaeec.org/pace/>

Newport News staff has begun to look at this program. Will you strongly consider its implementation in Newport News? After discussing with staff and understanding the impact and advantages of the program I would definitely support implementation.

4. An important way to cut costs and to reduce energy use is with solar installations, an area where our state can do better. Localities in Virginia are finding that purchasing solar power through a financing mechanism called Power Purchase Agreements lets them purchase renewable energy for less than they pay the utility. This way they can use operating funds rather than capital funds to expand the use of solar on community buildings. There are contracts available to simplify making these purchases. We are pleased to know that Newport News recently arranged for solar panels for five Newport News schools, to be installed in 2020, using a Power Purchase Agreement with Sun Tribe Solar.

Given the potential to save tax payer money, the ease of procurement and the need for the City of Newport News to move toward clean renewable energy, will you continue with more solar on schools and city government buildings? Yes. We are currently looking at the possibility of placing solar panels on the city jail. I think it's a great program!

Water, Wetlands, Land Use

5. The Chesapeake Bay is slowly recovering, and needs a passing grade of 70% out of 100%, calculated by the Chesapeake Bay Foundation (CBF) to represent a Bay coming back to health. In recent years we have seen fish consumption advisories, due to toxic contamination; a huge summer

“dead zone” with low oxygen levels; pollution from sewage overflows and agricultural runoff; and heavy sediment levels resulting in loss of important underwater grasses.

In 2018, the Bay’s health went down 1 point to 33%, a small decline due to excessive pollution from heavy storms. The link to the CBF State of the Bay Report for 2018 is:

<https://www.cbf.org/about-the-bay/state-of-the-bay-report/>

The EPA and the Commonwealth of Virginia have a plan of action to finally restore the Bay, setting limits on phosphorous and nitrogen loadings, which make up the total maximum daily loads (TMDLs). Each locality must do its part to comply in order for the Bay to recover, for the fisheries to recover, and for the citizens to enjoy the waters, without fear of incurring an illness.

As Councilmember, will you support and continue to comply with the Bay regulations, to include storm water regulations, which will bring the Chesapeake Bay back to sustainable health? **I pledge to comply with the Bay regulations.**

6. We received a sobering lesson with hurricane Katrina which devastated New Orleans in August of 2005, Hurricane Sandy in 2012, and three more huge hurricanes in 2017 Harvey, Irma, and Maria. In 2019 we saw hurricanes Barry and Dorian. Science predicts more severe weather patterns, as climate change worsens. Wetlands are vital in protecting our city during severe storm events, yet we are losing our natural wetlands to development.

How should we protect the remaining urban wetlands in Newport News?

We need to properly and responsibly develop property in the city. Making sure that setbacks and buffers are in place around our shorelines and protecting precious wetlands in our community is essential.

7. The state requires a 100-foot buffer adjacent to the Bay and tributaries for any new construction, yet development is often allowed, encroaching into this important buffer, using loopholes in the law. One loophole, called “intensely developed areas” or IDAs, would further eliminate natural shoreline protection. Another issue relates to sea level rise, which will occur more rapidly, due to global warming. Sea level rise in Hampton Roads is second highest in the nation, accelerated by land subsidence. A 3 foot rise is predicted by the end of this century, unless the ice caps melt more quickly, which could bring the rise to 6 feet. This rise will inundate our coasts, cutting into the buffers.

Will you strictly enforce a 100-foot buffer?

Will you set guidelines for some buildings to be placed back even further, or to utilize elevated construction? I will support strictly enforcing the 100-foot buffer and evaluate on a case by case basis the need to utilize a deeper buffer zone.

8. Riverview Farm Park is located on the James and Warwick Rivers in central Newport News. In 1991 Newport News City Council adopted a plan to create a new public park on the site of the City Farm and former Menchville landfill. This plan included 58 acres on the waterfront which continued to be used as a prison farm until 2015. The park was designed to serve the diverse interests of citizens, including active and passive recreation, as well as natural areas.

At this location there is an extraordinary range of Virginia history, reaching back to Native American times and later as the site of a colonial port town.

Preservation Virginia website:

https://preservationvirginia.org/docs/endangered_sites_2010.pdf

Hampton Roads Sanitation District (HRSD) has proposed the purchase of some City Farm land in order to upgrade its facilities. In addition, there will be about six pumping stations throughout the park to inject high quality treated water into the ground. The City of Newport News will receive compensation and negotiations may result in an agreement in the near future.

With the exception of about 10 acres, which HRSD has proposed purchasing (all but 4.5 acres of which will be put into a permanent conservation easement), will you maintain public ownership and the present zoning of the City Farm and all of Riverview Farm Park as parkland and not rezone to allow for any residential or commercial development there? **Yes**

Will you support the HRSD proposal to build trails on the City Farm land, including a trail along the waterfront and connecting back to existing trails in Riverview Farm Park, plus a trail connecting the City Farm to the Menchville Marina? **Yes**

Will you support the removal in the near future of old jail buildings, K-9 facilities, and other city facilities and equipment currently on the City Farm property? **Yes**

Will you support putting a substantial amount of money into the CIP as necessary to create a park for the people sooner rather than later? **Yes but depends on how we recover after the pandemic.**

Will you support the creation of a citizen's advisory panel to co-develop with the Director of Parks, Recreation and Tourism the details of the park? **Yes**

Will you promote our James River heritage through the education of our citizens and the preservation of natural areas in the Riverview and Deep Creek area? **Yes**

9. There is a proposal for a high-end residential development at Endview Plantation. This may compete with its historic nature, where Endview Plantation House is used as a Civil War museum and the grounds host Civil War enactments for youth and adults.

What is your position on the proposed housing development there? **I would like to see the full plan for the development and discuss how we can have new housing and at the same time respect, or even enhance, the rich history of the area.**

10. Currently, the Federal Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) is proposing to drill off Virginia's coast. Our coastal communities will be harmed from activities that accompany exploration and drilling operations, which include onshore damage, water pollution, air pollution and oil spills. Drilling will also be detrimental to marine wildlife. Fortunately, legislation was passed in the 2020 General Assembly of Virginia to restrict oil and gas drilling off our Virginia coast, which would make it more difficult for the federal government to override.

In addition, the City of Newport News has taken the prudent step to pass a resolution in opposition to offshore drilling, joining many other Virginia localities.

Rather than off-shore drilling, many encourage off-shore wind. Studies have found

that excellent strong winds blow off our Atlantic coast, which could be harnessed via an offshore grid to easily supply 20% of our electric energy needs, while creating thousands of new jobs.

Please explain your position on off-shore drilling. Totally Against It
Please explain your position on off-shore wind energy. I support off-shore wind projects, but I need to see how turbines will affect shipping lanes and military operations.

Solid Waste

11. There is long standing evidence that recycling benefits our quality of life. Newport News is among the most innovative cities when it comes to recycling and handling of hazardous waste. Sports events in Newport News have begun to set out recycling containers. Paint container recycling is now in place. However, there is some uncertainty regarding which household items are recyclable and which are not.

What do you recommend to help improve recycling awareness for residents in Newport News? We need to engage and educate young people more which will lead to their parents to better understand the details and importance of recycling.

The cost of glass recycling is expensive, and broken glass is a major contaminant in the recycling process. One solution is to eliminate glass in the recycling program and instead set up drop off sites, as is being done successfully in some northern Virginia localities.

Will you support this effort? Yes

12. A bill, SB 11, supported by the Sierra Club, passed in the 2020 General Assembly, allows localities to put a tax on plastic bags. Any locality may adopt this ordinance, placing a 5 cent fee per bag to be used for environmental cleanup and other purposes. This will discourage the use of single-use plastic bags, which may cause litter and damage. This link to the legislation provides an explanation on how the 5 cent fee is distributed:

<https://lis.virginia.gov/cgi-bin/legp604.exe?ses=201&typ=bil&val=sb11>

Will you set this ordinance in motion for Newport News? I definitely support the elimination of plastic bags. I will need to see what the economic impact would be on the city and citizens especially during this time.

Air Quality & Environmental Justice

13. There are many residents in Newport News who depend on the city's bus system for their primary source of transportation. Unfortunately, the bus schedules are not always convenient, causing people to miss appointments and lose jobs. A solution is to expand the system to certain parts of the city and increase the frequency of the routes.

Will you support improving the bus system? I support dedicated funding for public transit and for Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) in the city.

14. A good way to improve air quality is to champion the use of electric vehicles. This can be achieved by installing additional EV charging stations in Newport News.

Will you support installing additional stations? Yes

15. We are aware of illnesses aggravated by coal dust located in south Newport News. A primary illness is asthma. At Achievable Dream Academy, on 16th Street, Newport News, where about 700 students are enrolled, recent figures showed that 116 or 17% of the students have been diagnosed with asthma and 75 students keep rescue inhalers at the school. In addition to coal dust from the coal terminals, heavy traffic and emissions from other industries contribute to the bad air. Many parts of Newport News receive the airborne toxins which could be detrimental to the health of residents. One first step is to have one or more air monitors installed in that area.

Will you support efforts to bring about the installation of air monitors? Yes
What measures will you take to protect these children and others? Yes

General

16. **What environmental issue is of greatest concern to you? What do you recommend to address the problem? Sea-level rise in my opinion is the greatest threat to Newport News and the region as a whole. We need to work with our regional partners and the state to adopt comprehensive policies to address this challenge such as the ones proposed by the Sierra Club and other environmental groups.**

17. **What actions have you taken in support of environmental protection? If you have served as an elected official or other public or private endeavor, describe specific measures you have initiated or supported related to environmental issues. I was a member of the Newport News City Council from 2012 -2016. During that time I frequently met with the Sierra Club and other environmental groups to educate myself and address environmental issues in the region. I fully supported the city's strategic plan which includes progressive climate & environmental policies. When I'm elected I promise to continue my relationship with the Sierra Club to improve the overall quality of life for every citizen in Newport News through good environmental policy and stewardship.**