

**Erin Flynn's Responses to Sierra Club-Potomac River Group Questionnaire
(submitted 8/24/23)**

List your top three environmental priorities for Falls Church and describe what specific measures you will take to achieve them if elected.

1. Preserving the City's mature tree canopy and promoting green spaces

I view maintaining the mature tree canopy and promoting green spaces as a priority, especially downtown and in commercial areas and mixed-use developments. The City has long had the ability under state law to impose a 10% tree canopy requirement for sites zoned business, commercial, or industrial, and yet it's failed to do so. Council must impose tree canopy requirements via the municipal code, and it must seek greater tree cover and landscaped open space when negotiating with developers through the special exception approval process. To take one example, Founders Row is a four-acre development with only 7% landscaped open space, most of which is in the City's right-of-way along the street. Moreover, the City must protect mature trees on City property, as I've advocated in connection with the Park Avenue Great Streets project, given that those trees are integral for stormwater management, improved air quality, heat mitigation, carbon capture, and walkability. I see preserving the tree canopy as both an environmental issue and a green equity issue, as people living in denser housing also should have ready access to the environmental and health benefits of trees.

2. Planning for worsening climate events and improving stormwater management

The City must prepare for worsening climate events, including increased heat and heavier rainfall and flooding. I support steps to ensure the City is prepared for more frequent weather-related emergencies, including by making sure the community center has the necessary upgrades to perform as an emergency site, and is moving expeditiously to complete CIP stormwater projects. The City must also use the full extent of the Council approval process to improve stormwater management when properties are redeveloped. Relatedly, it's important that the City monitor construction sites to ensure there is no unpermitted discharge or unexpected, adverse effects on our stormwater system. There were recent reports, for example, of rising, discolored water in Pearson Branch near the Scout House, even when there had been no rainfall. The City must take such reports seriously and move quickly to ensure construction sites are being properly managed with appropriate oversight.

3. Reducing greenhouse gas emissions

The City and its residents must work together to respond to the climate crisis. As outlined below, I support the goals for reducing greenhouse gas emissions that the City Council adopted earlier this year in the Government Operations Energy Action Plan and that the City is finalizing in the Community Energy Plan, which Council is slated to approve this fall. The City Council must ensure those plans are timely implemented and funded during each budget cycle to ensure a sizable reduction in GHG emissions.

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City Council recently adopted the Government Operations Energy Action Plan (GOEAP). 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 believe it's important for the City government to lead by example and to itself take the steps it expects of its residents in order to meet the City's greenhouse gas reduction goals. (This is the same view I have as a manager in the federal workforce – that is, we must model and adhere to best practices if we expect private employers and states and localities to do the same.) I support the goals set forth in the GOEAP for the City government to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions by 50% by 2030 and to be carbon neutral by 2035. The 50% reduction seems readily attainable, especially where it includes purchasing renewable energy credits and entering virtual power purchase agreements, and so I'm glad that the plan also makes clear that committing to the combination of strategies could reduce emissions 80% from 2022 levels by 2030. This is especially so given the possible federal funding available, in the form of tax credits, rebates, and grants, for solar technologies, geothermal heating installation, electrical upgrades, efficiency and weatherization upgrades, vehicle and fleet optimization, and workforce education.

After having closely followed this budget cycle, as well as the CIP presentation, I'm confident the Deputy City Manager and grants team will aggressively pursue available funding. But the City Council will also need to commit funding in each budget cycle, and approve excess funds for one-time expenses to jump-start the plan, in order to meet its goals. Current staffing will inhibit implementation of the plan, and so I would support funding at least another full-time employee to work with Environmental Sustainability Coordinator Andy Young to roll out the program, coordinate training and outreach, and stay on schedule. As far as priorities within the different strategies, electrifying the school bus fleet and optimizing school bus routes should be an early focus. As a parent with a young child who rides the bus and who lives at the crossroads of multiple routes, I'm familiar with the routes and agree that more could be done to reduce fuel demand and improve the routes. And the public safety fleet also should continue to be updated, especially given the proximity of the police department to the City's EV charging stations. Having more electric vehicles and upgrading to solar on government and school buildings also are highly visible steps that reinforce the City's commitment to achieving these goals and model action that community members can take to reduce energy consumption and transportation-related emissions.

One area that the Government Operations Energy Action Plan overlooks is steps the City can take with respect to the natural environment to help meet its climate objectives. Mature trees are imperative to stormwater management, air quality, heat mitigation, and carbon capture. In the last budget cycle, I urged the City to fund an updated tree inventory on City property and rights-of-way and to ensure the City Arborist has the staff and resources to effectively care for City trees. The Comprehensive Plan recognizes maintenance of the urban forest among the City's 2040 goals, and mature trees are important to counteracting urban heat islands and achieving other environmental benefits. As the City continues to develop, I will advocate for tree canopy and landscaped open space requirements in our commercial and mixed-use projects to counteract the urban heat island effects of larger projects and ensure we are maximizing energy efficiency and creating bike-friendly and pedestrian friendly environments.

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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 goals of 50% reduction of 2005 levels by 2030, and 80% reduction of those levels by 2050. These are aggressive goals, given that the City only met its goal of 20% reduction of 2005 levels by 2020 because of the precipitous decline of vehicle use at the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic. Yet it's important to take aggressive action and communicate consistently and often to City residents and businesses that they are integral to reducing greenhouse gas emissions and meeting climate-related goals.

One of the most important things the City can do is embark on a robust education campaign to make clearer those steps City residents can take to reduce their climate footprint. People need information about how their decisions affect the City's ability to reach its community-wide goals both before they are confronted with a decision and at the time they are deciding between options. I support providing information to residents early and often about energy efficiency, weatherization, and transportation, among other topics. Whenever the City mails real estate assessments, property tax statements, and personal property tax bills, for example, it should include information on available rebates, tax credits, and grants to improve energy efficiency and the cost savings associated with those upgrades. It also could include information on publicly available EV charging stations, like those at City Hall, Capital Bikeshare memberships, and bus routes to and from each metro station. Because many people complete upgrades when they first move, the City's new resident checklist should include infographics about environmentally sustainable choices, from LED lights, to composting, to solar panels. And the City also should encourage the use of LED lights and water-efficient, low flow fixtures when residents seek an electrical or plumbing permit, for example. For a pretty nominal sum, the City could consider doing an incandescent-LED lightbulb trade-in event at the Farmers Market while at the same time providing information about group purchase options for solar panels through Solarize Nova or something similar for heat pumps that FC CAN might be able to organize. The City also should regularly highlight these issues in its e-communications.

Commercial developments and businesses also play an important role in reducing greenhouse gas emissions. For that reason, I would support grants and tax incentives for businesses to undertake upgrades. In Fairfax, for example, the Economic Development Authority offers businesses financial assistance by reimbursing 50% of project costs, up to \$20,000, to reduce the costs associated with the design, repair, and rehabilitation of buildings or other high-quality improvements. Although that program is geared toward aesthetic improvements that also improve the customer experience, the City should explore a similar program targeted at efficiency upgrades for businesses and commercial property owners in Falls Church. The City should also work with commercial property owners to provide improved shared-parking agreements that reduce the need for residents and visitors to repeatedly move their cars during outings. Similarly, although the City has started seeking EV charging stations as a voluntary concession in mixed-use developments, it's not clear whether those stations are reserved for building residents. The City should ensure that at

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least a portion of EV charging stations are publicly available at such buildings, as they are at Founders Row.

Finally, as multiple mixed-use projects come online and people regularly move between Broad & Washington and West Falls, for example, the City should explore the possibility of an electric shuttle similar to the DC Circulator that moves people along Broad Street and between the metro stations and Eden Center. To be sure, people could take the bus, and eventually bus rapid transit, but there may be a greater willingness among residents to ride a Falls Church-specific shuttle. Relatedly, the City must continue to improve bike connectivity throughout the City, including by creating safe bike routes to and from Oak Street and the middle school/high school campus and by increasing the number of Capital Bikeshare stations in residential neighborhoods. The City also must focus on sidewalk and crosswalk improvements to promote walkability.

I attended the Community Energy Plan kick-off event at the high school in April and will look forward to the completion of the plan this fall. Because the overwhelming majority of greenhouse gas emissions result from the community at large, and not the City government, the challenge for the City will be educating the public and incentivizing residents to change their behavior. As a Council member, I'd regularly look for ways to do so.

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?

As the recent T-zone amendments showed, any changes to the zoning code need to be preceded by broad public outreach, community conversations about what the City is trying to achieve, and an openness to public comment that helps inform the scope of any amendments and ensures there is community buy-in for the change. Residents recognize the need to respond to the housing and climate crises and they should be entrusted to help develop community-based solutions to these issues. I would prioritize public outreach, respect concerns about the pace of the City's growth, and support changes that enjoy broad community support and incorporate rules and processes that enable the City to grow while maintaining our tree canopy, decreasing impervious surfaces, increasing green infrastructure, improving stormwater management, promoting pedestrian safety and bikeability, and maximizing energy efficiency.

I recognize that greater flexibility for accessory dwelling units is one way of responding to the housing crisis. I also recognize that such units can be more energy efficient with a smaller footprint than other buildings. I would be hesitant, however, to simply open all R1-A and R1-B lots to the construction of accessory dwellings. Eighty percent of the City's tree canopy is on private land, and our tree canopy has been diminishing as the City undergoes significant redevelopment and many single-family homes are torn down for larger homes. Between 2014 and 2018, for example, the Chesapeake Conservancy Land Cover Data Project found that the City lost 3.76 acres of tree canopy and .80 acres of pervious soil but gained 1.2 acres of new turf. I would guess the loss of tree canopy has further accelerated in recent years, because of larger redevelopment and tear-downs.

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In evaluating whether to allow greater flexibility for accessory dwelling units, and where, I would be interested in whether and how the City may be able to require more pervious coverage in connection with any approvals for such projects (for example, by conditioning approval on the inclusion of a permeable driveway). I’d also want to know whether it could require all-electric dwellings (meeting Energy Star Next Gen requirements, for example) and better stormwater management, including through conservation landscaping and the use of rain barrels and rain gardens. I also would want to ensure that accessory dwelling units are built in locations that are more central to downtown and public transit, so that the City is not inviting housing that adds more vehicles. And I would want to look at the latest demographic data and understand the nature of any projections the City could make—as to housing, service costs, and schools—related to increased flexibility for such units.

In my view, a better way of adding smaller-scale housing may be to reexamine the R-M (residential multifamily) ordinance to allow its application to additional parcels in commercial corridors. As the municipal code states, the R-M district “is created for the purposes of maintaining the residential character of the city and meeting the residential needs of the population by providing apartment homes in a variety of sizes, styles, densities and forms of ownership. The multifamily district is intended to provide creativity in residential design, in locations that are near major transportation services, stores, offices and community facilities.” Sec. 48-361.

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

I support updates to the code governing transition districts, but I don’t agree with the latest proposal that Council approved at first reading on August 7. In my view, the by-right parameters are too generous and cede one of the only tools the City has – the Council approval process – to secure better projects. The latest proposal is a missed opportunity, both to get more affordable housing and to achieve better environmental outcomes. It also threatens four historic properties that sit on lots with extensive tree canopy and green space.

When the City first considered amending the T-zone ordinance, it retained former Arlington Planning Director Susan Bell to help determine what level of development would be appropriate for T-zones. Bell recommended a 50% building and impervious surface maximum, to permit more residential development while also ensuring a functional tree canopy and responding to stormwater issues. When the City sought to permit building and impervious surface coverage significantly greater than what Bell recommended, the City Arborist recommended that the City reduce building coverage to 55% by-right (and 60% to 65% by Special Use Permit) and impervious coverage to 70% to allow for both a functional 15% tree canopy and adequate stormwater facilities. The City’s latest proposal permits 60% building coverage by-right, and 70% coverage by SUP, allows 80% impervious coverage, and includes only a 10% tree canopy requirement for commercial and residential uses. Buildings can be constructed at 45-feet by-right, and 50-feet by SUP, with densities

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of 34 to 40 units per acre. By-right projects are subject only to the Virginia Uniform Statewide Building Code.

I've consistently advocated for less permissive by-right parameters so that more projects are required to go through the SUP process. In this way, the City can ensure it is getting the housing it needs while also responding to site-specific stormwater concerns and retaining the ability to seek more energy-efficient buildings that have EV charging capacity and are solar ready. It can also ensure development that incorporates trees and green space and that helps to counteract the urban heat island effects from larger developments like Founders Row and Broad & Washington that sit adjacent to T-zones along Park Avenue and North Washington Street. Instead, the vast majority, if not all, projects will include by-right construction that are subject only to grading plan or site plan review, which must be granted so long as the project conforms to the technical requirements of the code.