

Sierra Club Huron Valley Group

2012 Questions for Ann Arbor City Council Candidates

1. **What do you see as the most important environmental problems facing Ann Arbor? As a council member, what would you do about them?**

1. Transportation Options: Ann Arbor and Southeast Michigan remain highly dependent on single-passenger automobiles for our transportation system. This exacerbates our reliance on fossil fuels and the environmental damage that comes with them: extraction-related damage as we saw with the BP oil spill, transportation-related damage as we saw with the spill in the Kalamazoo river, local air pollution, and global warming pollution leading to climate destabilization.

While a comprehensive solution to this problem depends on national and international policy, especially putting a price on carbon, there are local actions Ann Arbor can take:

- Improving our sustainable transportation infrastructure of sidewalks, bike paths, walking paths, and related infrastructure (e.g. bike parking, safe pedestrian crossings).
- Promoting efforts to improve access to mass transit, carpooling, and ridesharing resources.
- Preventing suburban sprawl that not only compromises our farmland and natural areas, but also traps people in auto-dependency.

2. Stormwater management: Climate destabilization is leading to a situation in which we are likely to face more extreme weather, and indeed, this may already be what we see. Our existing stormwater systems are failing to address our current weather patterns. Not only do homeowners experience residential flooding, but we also see pollution in the Huron River during storm events. Furthermore, suburban sprawl increases impervious area and decreases natural features that mitigate flooding and protect water quality, exacerbating stormwater problems.

Addressing these concerns is a long-term process. It involves incentivizing and, at times, mandating improved stormwater management features (rain gardens, pervious material, etc.) and exploring new technologies in municipal projects such as permeable pavement. (See question 11 for additional detail.)

2. **Are there activities or projects you have undertaken in public office or as a private citizen that demonstrate your ability to be an effective advocate for the environment?**

My engagement in political activism began in college with my membership in Free the Planet! and the Environmental Action Group. In those roles, I educated students about how they could reduce their environmental impact, lobbied for stronger environmental laws, and supported people engaging in nonviolent direct action at Staples and Home Depot locations to protest the sale of products made by clearing old growth forests.

During my time at Interfaith Council for Peace and Justice, I helped create our Climate Change and Earthcare Task Force, which engages people of faith and secular people of conscience on environmental issues. In this role I have testified at a public hearing in opposition to expanding Michigan's supply of coal-fired power plants, organized press conferences and lobbying visits to support strong and comprehensive climate legislation, and organized "train the trainer" programs for members of religious communities to help their members measure and reduce their climate footprint.

I also strive to be responsible to the Earth in my personal life. I bike to work. I compost and recycle. I tend native plants and remove invasive species in our neighborhood park through Adopt-a-Park. I have insulated, weatherized, and installed high-efficiency appliances in our home. We keep our thermostat low in the winter. We eat local and organic. I print on recycled and reused paper. I strive to practice in my daily life the same values of environmental stewardship that I preach as an environmental advocate in my professional life.

3. **3a. Would you support putting a proposal on the city ballot that would strengthen the city charter to require a vote of the public before any parkland owned by the City of Ann Arbor could be sold, LEASED, converted to non-park use, or otherwise removed from its designation as a park? Why or why not?**

The city's parkland is property that the city manages for the benefit of current and future residents and for deeper environmental benefits. The decisions about how we manage that land are weighty and deserve thoughtful examination and meaningful public input. Therefore, I am supportive of the principle of this proposal and of putting any conversion of parkland to non-park use to a vote, but I would need several questions addressed about the details before I could commit to supporting such an amendment.

I would want to see that such an amendment does not unduly hinder partnerships with non-city entities. For example, if in the development of a downtown public space, the decision was made to create a funding stream by leasing a food operation to a private entity (such as is done at Campus Martius in Detroit and, I believe, Millennium Park in Chicago), would that business lease need voter approval? Would voter approval be required to change from one vendor to another in that space? I believe these concerns can be addressed in the amendment text.

Overall, I support the principles of public involvement in decision making and setting a high standard for that involvement before removing land from park usage.

- 3b. Along with 3a, would you support putting a proposal on the city ballot creating all lands designated under the current PROS plan as city parkland to be placed under a separate zoning as Parkland (PK) rather than being within the current public land (PL) zoning list. [PL zoning does not differentiate land used for City Hall, or the Recycling Drop Off Center, for example, from land used for parks.] The Sierra Club is concerned that a simple repurpose of parkland under the PL zoning facilitates "backdoor" transfer of city parkland without a vote of the public electorate. Would you support creation of a separate zoning for city parkland? Why or why not?**

Yes, I support the creation of a parkland zoning designation separate from the public land zoning. I also support creating relevant code to protect the environmental and recreational usage that we expect from parkland. A neighborhood park is different than a parking lot or a fire station and park usage should be protected.

Beyond this proposal, I would support exploring how the city can use zoning, planning, and other tools to preserve green infrastructure whether on parkland or not (www.epa.gov/greeninfrastructure/).

As with question 3a, there are details that need to be addressed in the implementation of such a proposal, such as how facilities listed on the park inventory (PROS plan pp. 42-45) that are not parks in the traditional sense (e.g. the Eberbach Cultural Arts Building) should be addressed.

4. **What will you do to assure the establishment of the first actual and usable section of the Allen Creek Greenway during your elected tenure?**

I see two city-owned properties that have immediate potential to be part of the Greenway: 415 West Washington and 721 North Main. Either site would make a good initial section of the Allen Creek Greenway. As a member of Council, I would support this process in three ways:

- a. seek outside funding such as brownfield grants and Great Lakes Restoration Grants.
- b. explore partnerships and opportunities such as involving MDOT in creating a pedestrian connector across North Main Street when they redo Business 23/North Main.
- c. encourage restarting the conversation about the vision for 415 West Washington. Should the parcel be just greenway property, or should it include other uses such as an arts center?

I would also support, as recommended by the PROS plan, the creation of a master plan for a future Allen Creek Greenway in cooperation with stakeholders such as the DDA, University of Michigan, and Ann

Arbor Railroad (p. 117).

Central to this process would be coordination with the Parks Advisory Commission to ensure proper management of greenway properties. As the 2012 PROS plan notes, “While there were a number of comments supporting a greenway [in the parks acquisition survey], especially along the Allen Creek, survey participants were generally concerned about the financial management, maintenance, and protection of existing parks” (p. 82). For the Allen Creek Greenway to succeed, a balance must be maintained between existing parks and the Greenway, and the strong possibility of bringing in outside funding makes this a balance I believe we can find.

5. What are your thoughts on the actions Council has taken on the Border-to-Border Trail and non-motorized transport?

I have been pleased to see the completion of the Border-to-Border trail and the expansion of bike lanes, including the partnership with the DDA to expand bike lanes on Fifth and Division. As someone who regularly walks to our downtown, I am very grateful for the expansion of safe pedestrian crossing technologies such as the HAWK signal by the YMCA and rapid flashing beacons like the one at 7th and Washington. As a bicycle commuter, I am also grateful for the addition of “sharrows” on streets that serve both bike and automobile traffic.

That said, the city still has work to do, including:

- a. connecting bike lanes (e.g. on N. Division)
- b. improving safety on heavily-used areas of the Border-to-Border trail (like Gallup Park) where people have expressed concerns around cyclists and walkers sharing the trail.

6. Do you support the upcoming parks millage renewal? Why or why not?

Yes, I support the upcoming parks millage renewal. Our park system is part of what makes Ann Arbor great and it is essential that the city be able to maintain and improve its 2,600+ acres of parkland identified in the PROS plan.

7. Do you support the city’s proposal to convert 10 acres of Fuller Park into a new rail transit station? Do you support a full environmental assessment of alternative sites for this station, including an upgrade of the current Amtrak site on Depot Street along with other potential sites? Where do you think is the best location for a rail station? How is your view influenced by the fact that Fuller Park is parkland?

I am a strong proponent of improving transportation options, including rail. Therefore, I support efforts to find a site that could support a rail station. The ideal site would be:

- a. Accessible by rail with minimal disruption of existing lands;
- b. Sited in an area that would support mixed-use activity around the station;
- c. Accessible to adequate usable parking;
- d. Near existing employment centers and transit routes.

Fuller Road meets 2 of these 4 criteria. Given the existing land use in Ann Arbor, I am not aware of a site that would meet all four. There is clearly work to do to find a viable means to support improved rail service in Ann Arbor. Therefore, I would support a full assessment of the Fuller Road site and alternative sites in hopes of finding a site that better meets the community's needs and promotes environmental conservation.

The future of this site is a significant public concern, especially with the proposed Fuller Road Station recognized as part of Fuller Park in the PROS plan. If a rail transit station is developed on Fuller Road, I believe the loss of parkland should be balanced by the acquisition of new parkland that meets or exceeds the public and environmental benefits of the repurposed site.

8. **What are your ideas for furthering sustainable practices in Ann Arbor? Consider both construction and improved efficiency efforts. Which of your ideas would you put as your (two) top priority/ies, and if elected would you be willing to strongly advocate for it/them?**

Ann Arbor has many opportunities for enhanced sustainability, including:

- Improving transportation options, including enhancing regional transit and improving non-motorized infrastructure.
- Improving stormwater and water quality management, e.g., through the use of permeable pavement and similar technologies.
- Sustainable energy policies, e.g., supporting decentralized energy production and energy efficiency initiatives. Specific opportunities here include expanding the PACE program to residential properties and extending the conversion to LED lighting.
- Encouraging sustainable land use policies so that appropriate-density development is focused in already-developed areas and in locations with access to transit and nonmotorized transportation options, rather than sprawling development that demolishes forest and farms.
- Sustainable building policies: Some robust sustainability improvements, such as greywater systems, are currently difficult to implement because building codes have not been updated to respond to these emerging technologies. I would like to see Ann Arbor lead the way in updating such policies and push for changes at the state level to encourage these cutting-edge sustainability practices.

Of these opportunities, I would put sustainable energy as my top priority. Climate destabilization exacerbates other problems such as stormwater concerns. The City has already led efforts to increase municipal energy efficiency (e.g., with the LED lighting project), directly supported alternative energy production (e.g., the photovoltaic panels at the Farmers' Market), and supported sustainable energy at commercial properties (e.g., through the PACE Program). This is a good start, but the scale of the climate crisis demands that we not let up. We have the opportunity to be trailblazers toward a green energy future.

My second priority is stormwater management. Over many decades, Ann Arbor has established a large footprint of impervious material, a situation that will take time to address. We must proactively seize opportunities to preserve green infrastructure and implement technologies like green roofs, pervious pavement, and rain gardens.

9. **What changes should the city make to continue and enhance its recycling program? Consider cost and efficacy of single stream recycling.**

Ann Arbor's recycling participation is high among single-family residences, but our participation is significantly lower among multi-family units. When I lived in an apartment, we sometimes could not recycle because the limited recycling containers were simply overflowing. I believe that improving recycling access and participation in multi-unit residences is where the greatest increase in recycling will take place. However, improving these numbers is not easy. In particular, there are two strategies I would like to see explored:

Improving access: Access to recycling in many apartments and condos is too limited or too inconvenient. I see many facilities at which the recycling cart is an under-sized, hard-to-access afterthought to the abundant dumpster access on site. Ann Arbor, along with partners like Recycle Ann Arbor, should look at ways to increase recycling access in existing units and encourage developers of new units to better integrate recycling access into site plans.

Improving the use of "social proof" and other behavior-change tools: A growing body of research shows that education and awareness raising alone are rarely effective at creating behavior change (see for example <http://www.cbsm.com/pages/guide/fostering-sustainable-behavior/>). Instead, psychological tools such as "social proof," that is, "what do people like me do?" can be more powerful drivers of behavior change. I believe awareness-based, "it's good to recycle"-type campaigns have neared the limits of their effectiveness, and that outreach efforts based on the emerging research into behavior change can further increase participation.

The upcoming revision of the city's solid waste plan is an opportunity to explore these strategies.

There is significant debate within the environmental community regarding single-stream vs. multiple stream recycling. Some communities, such as Ann Arbor, have opted for the simplicity of single-stream, while other communities go so far as to ask people to sort based on glass tint and paper type (office, colored, newspaper). To evaluate the effectiveness of Ann Arbor's single-stream program, I would want to consider:

- Collection costs (labor, equipment, consumables)
- Sorting costs
- Market value of recycled products
- Quality of recycled products
- Environmental impact of recycling efforts

The "costs" above include both financial and environmental costs. In addition to the monetary costs of curbside recycling pickup, we should also consider the emissions it generates (CO2 and others). We have seen an increase in recycling participation since the adoption of single-stream recycling, but other factors need to be considered as well.

10. The city has set a goal of using a 5% renewable energy portfolio community-wide by 2015. The Sierra Club and other environmental organizations are backing a statewide proposal to have a 25% renewable energy portfolio by 2025? What actions by the city would you support to address these goals?

Renewable portfolio standards are a vital tool in shifting our state and nation toward a clean-energy economy, especially in the absence of national and international agreements to put a price on carbon.

I see three primary ways that Ann Arbor can push toward meeting renewable energy portfolio goals:

- Source renewable energy: while the trading of renewable energy certificates is controversial, it is currently the industry standard for certifying purchase of renewable energy. While not a perfect solution, the more consumers who purchase green tags, the greater the support for the creation of renewable energy capacity.
- Invest in green energy production: Ann Arbor's numerous green energy initiatives also play a part in creating a green energy economy. The solar panels at the Farmers Market are a start, but we should look for additional ways to expand green energy production in ways that are appropriate to Ann Arbor's climate profile.
- Facilitate decentralized generation: Local resident Max Heirich has been exploring ways to facilitate the creation of decentralized clean energy production as opposed to centralized, utility-controlled production. The City should look for ways to remove barriers and create incentives for the creation of a resilient and clean energy production infrastructure.

A renewable portfolio standard should be complemented by acting on the tremendous energy and carbon savings that are possible through efficiency increases. Initiatives such as LED street lights do not fit directly under RPS, but they reduce CO2 pollution, save taxpayer money, and yield other benefits to the community (in the case of LED streetlights, reduced light pollution). These initiatives should also be considered as part of a comprehensive energy plan. Reducing energy consumption effectively increases the share of renewable energy used by the city, as less conventional energy must be purchased.

The city is currently developing a climate action plan and I look forward to seeing what goals and practices it recommends.

11. Allen Creek flooding continues to plague the Old Westside. What actions would you take to correct this ongoing problem? What community outreach would you include?

As I indicated in question 1, I see flooding as a major concern, both for homeowners and for the Huron River watershed. And while Allen Creek has been a high-profile area of concern, the Old Westside is not the only area affected by residential flooding.

Stormwater mitigation efforts can be divided into four categories:

- projects that the city can control directly because they are on city land
- project that the city can mandate because they are part of redevelopment
- projects that the city can encourage private landowners to take
- projects managed by other governmental entities that the city can partner with (Water Resources Commissioner, State DEQ, etc.)

City projects: Through its roads, parks, and other municipal properties, the city controls a significant amount of land. This creates tremendous opportunity for stormwater mitigation. In its parks, for example, the city can use features such as native plantings, rain gardens, and bioswales to slow the flow of rainwater into the stormwater system. The city can also continue to explore the use of pervious pavement. While the upfront cost is higher, some sources indicate that there can be very significant direct and indirect savings that extend beyond reducing flooding (e.g. reduced to eliminated winter salt use on pervious pavement)..

City mandates: Much of the city's built infrastructure predates modern stormwater mitigation standards. Outdated, impervious developments like Maple Village are significant contributors to Ann Arbor's flooding problems and the Huron River's nonpoint runoff problems. We can do better, which is why I support setting clear, high standards for redevelopment that will better mitigate stormwater and enhance the vitality of our business districts and the health of our neighborhoods. (As an added benefit, high standards for redevelopment also give us opportunities to improve pedestrian, bicycle, and handicap accessibility)

Encouraging landowners: While the City can do much on its own lands and on lands undergoing redevelopment, most Ann Arbor land does not fall into those categories. However, the city can encourage landowners to use rain barrels and rain gardens, plant native species, and reduce their impervious area. I have seen several positive efforts in recent years on these fronts, such as stormwater utility credits for rain barrels and rain gardens, the RiverSafe homes campaign, and requirements for stormwater management plans for residential projects that increase impervious area by more than 200 square feet. Unfortunately, many people are unaware of these programs. I would support using utility bill mailings, the WasteWatcher publication, and other outreach methods to increase adoption of stormwater mitigation systems.

Partner projects: The city should look for new opportunities to partner with governmental agencies to address wastewater and other sustainability concerns. One example of such a partnership is the proposed use of 721 N. Main as a greenbelt parcel that could involve MDOT, county, and federal funds to establish stormwater mitigation measures, parkland features, and pedestrian safety enhancements.

12. **What is your view of the importance and impact of the Park Advisory Commission as compared to other city commissions e.g Planning Commission?**

As an Adopt-A-Park steward, I am deeply committed to the health of Ann Arbor's park system, and I believe that the Park Advisory Commission is an important part of that. I believe a comprehensive environmental perspective should not be limited only to the Park Advisory Commission. For example, the planning commission can work to prevent suburban sprawl and support projects that integrate with transit services. The Ann Arbor Transportation Authority, while a separate institution, can foster tremendous environmental benefits by getting people out of their cars and into sustainable transportation. Even the Housing Commission can affect the environment by investing in green building retrofits of affordable housing stock. A holistic environmental perspective on city government does not limit environmental issues to traditionally "green" bodies such as the Parks Advisory and Environmental Commissions but instead looks at how all aspects of the city can be used to enhance environmental sustainability.