



Climate Action Coffee Questions for Takoma Park 2022 Candidates for Mayor and City Council

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These questions have been prepared by [Takoma Park Climate Action Coffee \(CAC\)](#) with assistance from its working groups (Pollinators, Takoma Stormwater Solutions, and Community Food Forest). CAC is a part of the Takoma Park Mobilization (TPM) and began meeting weekly starting in October 2019.

We are providing these questions to all candidates. When responses are received, they will be shared with our members and other Takoma Park organizations who may be interested, likely including TPM's email list of ca. 2,500.

Your Background and Experience; What Will You Bring?

B1. Can you describe the skills, training, and background you feel qualify you for the position you seek? Do you have budget experience? Project management? Do you have any background related to the environmental issues we will increasingly experience due to climate change, like heat, drought, fires, more severe storms and flooding, economic impacts on lower income communities, etc.? What practical experience do you bring to the table?

I bring a wealth of professional and life experience to this position. I have more than 20 years of professional experience as a Senior Technical Advisor, specialized in building complex, challenging partnerships across multiple countries and continents. I have worked for about one decade each in the health and conservation sectors respectively, at World Wildlife Fund and Pathfinder International. My professional reputation has been built on having successfully supported large organizations and governments in identifying innovative ways to pilot, scale up, finance, and leverage support for communities to get the essential services they need. I have a Masters' in Public Affairs which is similar to an MBA for the public sector, involving both policy studies and public administration. In these positions, I have managed budgets, created results and outcomes based workplans, managed teams of people across cultures and language differences, and worked in communities with local governments and citizens to identify

their highest priority needs and how to get things done. In the last seven years, my professional field has evolved into one focused on women's resilience in the face of climate change, to which I authored a first ever strategy advising a multi-national organization how to move forward on these issues. Thus I have become a skilled navigator of climate mitigation and climate resilience practices and policies, particularly with respect to the most vulnerable communities. In addition, I speak Spanish, among other foreign languages, and am using the Spanish already to connect with the large contingent of our Ward's community that has historically been quite isolated from City governance. I am ready to bring all of these skills and experience to bear to ensure that every community and individual across my Ward is integrated into City processes as much as they are interested, willing and able, and that their priorities are successfully advanced, no matter the challenges we face. I will also use my skills and experience to build collaboration and consensus to the greatest degree possible among my diverse constituency.

Climate

Keeping in mind that Takoma Park has residents, businesses, and organizations with incredible talents and resources who are very informed on these topics and who are eager to be engaged:

C1. What will you do to lead the community to rapidly reduce Takoma Park's climate impact, both to reduce the City's carbon footprint, and to increase carbon drawdown and sequestration? How will you effectively coordinate climate and environmental adaptation and mitigation strategies across all City Departments?

I am pleased that the City already has a Climate Strategy and has set some broad goals. It is my current understanding that the City needs to do more to transform the Strategy into a more detailed actionable plan, and yet I know that some of this planning has already been discussed and undertaken. I am looking forward to learning more and digging in deeply to hear what steps have been taken by some of our resident experts and how we can leverage this expertise to build a viable plan that our City staff and Councilmembers can help realize. Climate adaptation and mitigation mandates multilateral partnerships and collaborations in every direction to be successful. I am committed to being a coordinator and partnership builder that listens carefully and helps us prioritize and build the plans we need to achieve our ambitious strategy.

C2. What will you do to lead our community's resilience for the impacts already upon us – such as increased rainfall, increased heat, food insecurity – and affecting especially those in our community with limited access to resources?

Increased rainfall and heat are two climate-exacerbated issues that should be of particular concern to our City government, and I am committed to tackling these issues. While food insecurity is also a significant issue in Takoma Park and my Ward, and I am committed to working on food insecurity, to me this is a separate issue from climate, as it relates to our Takoma Park residents (I am open to discussion about this if others want to convince me).

I am committed to supporting any efforts already underway, or taking new steps to generate priority initiatives that will tackle the heat crisis and particularly its impacts on our most vulnerable populations. We will need to prioritize those steps that we absolutely must do now, but these are steps that we cannot afford to delay. Heat increases and storm unpredictability are already upon us, and it is our job to protect all of our citizens. I will support and lead on efforts to ensure that every household has access to emergency cooling sites within our City limits, and that all homebound residents are identified and given access to reliable means of cooling and communicating in emergency situations. We also must continue to broaden efforts to make sure shade trees are planted in places where there is an excess of concrete or waiting areas for transit, or consider other creative means of reducing heatload around pedestrians.

With regards to increased rainfall, and preparation for unusual storm events (which are also now increasing in frequency), I will help lead on building the types of alliances we need with County and State government to be prepared to share and exchange resources when and where they are needed, as a key means of responding rapidly to crises. This is one of the key strategies that government around the world are using to deal with the fact that no single government entity can afford to be ready for crisis on the scale that we are increasingly going to be experiencing.

I am also committed to deep engagement on Stormwater Management as this is vital to our City's interests, my particular Ward's needs, and to the fact that our City sits in a watershed area. I will take particular interest in engaging heavily with resident experts, reading any data and reports available on how we can move forward in the most informed way, and again, in exploring how the City might build vital bridges that will enable us to take advantage of funding transfers from other levels of government to invest in better stormwater management. This is not an issue that Takoma Park should deal with in isolation as we are embedded within a larger watershed, and yet right now I have reached out to the County because they are conducting a Stormwater Management process that they have informed me explicitly EXCLUDES the City of Takoma Park. We must engage ourselves in this kind of process and find ways to integrate the City's stormwater management needs into the planning and implementation.

C3. How would you actively involve concerned residents and experts who live and/or work in the City? What policy priorities and strategies will you recommend to encourage greater civic engagement and partnership with the City? Would you be willing to designate one or more staff person(s) with specific responsibility to help coordinate and work with community and resident-led adaptation and mitigation partnerships?

I would want to talk to a number of parties across the City to give a solid answer to this question. It is a good idea in theory to have a single person whose responsibility would include this coordination and working role. However, I know that our City is currently experiencing staff shortages and we also have budgetary challenges. It might be prudent that a staff person be partnered with an experienced City Council person for example in order to support coordination on these issues, and advance the collective agenda. But various options might need to be explored to ensure that objectives or greater civic engagement and partnership can be met and achieved, within the City's budgetary constraints.

C4. Many jurisdictions consider Climate Action Plans to be, of necessity, living documents that

continually must be revised to reflect changing outlooks and conditions. What will you do to bring Takoma Park's plan up to date?

I would like to learn more about Committee work on Climate Planning within the City. It is my understanding that the Committees have done a lot of good work to help advance Climate Planning, and I am certain that TP has some of the top professional experts in the Country on these issues. If this is the case, then I imagine that the Committee has already provided recommendations on next steps to update the City's plan. We should ensure that these recommendations are utilized to inform an updated draft plan that I would imagine can be written by staff in our City government. The Committee should then be asked to review and comment on the draft until the draft meets Committee and City Council expectations for quality adherence to recommendations.

Stormwater

Residents are experiencing the impacts of the growing amounts and intensity of rainfall during storms.

S1. Are you in favor of City funding for architectural & engineering studies for environmental services collaboration on private property?

I am not sure. In theory, I would like to say a resounding yes. I have experienced the horrors and costs of stormwater issues directly on my property. However, I am also keenly aware of the extraordinary cost this could imply to the City. What I think is that the City needs to have a comprehensive plan for how to mitigate or redress the costs to any single individual that has an undue burden due to stormwater management issues, and create regulations and frameworks that begin to shift costs to where they belong—on those who have added to the problems and done little or nothing to mitigate. Right now, almost all efforts are completely piecemeal. To my knowledge, no private owners in TP have been held accountable, even when entire properties have been destroyed due to their negligence.

S2. How would you address flooding in the most vulnerable neighborhoods/watersheds like Maple Avenue and Circle Woods?

I would like to learn more about how and to what extent we see these areas being so vulnerable and how we expect this to play out, before suggesting how we would address flooding in these areas. I have been here for more than 20 years and witnessed at least a few major flood events. I think there is a lot to discuss here and I welcome a highly informed discussion, with data, photos and maps.

S3. What would you do to address flooding that could be exacerbated by City projects?

I believe that every City construction or infrastructure project should include considerations of how flooding may be exacerbated, in consultation with experts who know how to assess the situation. So far, I have been utterly unimpressed by the lack of and poor understanding of stormwater management demonstrated by the Flower Avenue project, for example. I presume this is in part because we lack such expertise on staff, but it would have been wise to have tapped our resident experts in this case.

S4. What are your thoughts regarding concerns that the Library is sited in a floodplain likely to experience increasingly severe flooding events as climate change accelerates?

This concerns me and I would like to learn a lot more about the issue, have the maps shown to me, explained in detail, and have the chance to ask many questions.

S5. Would you support a Citizens task force on stormwater to help the City prepare a strategic plan for stormwater management? Have you read our Takoma Stormwater Solutions' *PROPOSED PLAN FOR DEVELOPING A STORMWATER RESILIENCE STRATEGIC PLAN IN TAKOMA PARK*? Can you comment on it?

Not yet, but I will commit to reading it in detail, as this is among my top issues to address in relation to my Ward. I would be interested in discussing the value of a Citizen task force on stormwater management, as it seems like this might be an excellent way to tap our local expertise and save the City money on experts that we likely do not have on staff.

TSS Proposed Plan ... - https://drive.google.com/file/d/1N6AE--z-2BpiLQkK-8xNkluPuekpN95_/view

S6. What is the City's role and responsibility to educate and incentivize residents to mitigate stormwater on their property?

I welcome a deep conversation, reading and learning exercise with our resident stormwater experts on where the City can and should head on these issues. Without that deep knowledge as yet, I would propose that the City's role and responsibility is to work at a minimum as a coordinator between and among property owners (including the City itself), and at best as a regulator and enforcer, to ensure that stormwater is adequately mitigated straight from the source. I have been consistently frustrated that the City has not taken on either of these roles with respect to private property, and am glad that they are now taking some steps to change this trajectory. This will require a lot of research, trial and error, to get it right.

Wildlife Corridor & Native Plants

Many of you have heard of Doug Tallamy's Homegrown National Park movement, and most likely the Maryland Chapter of the Sierra Club's effort to create and map a wildlife corridor of native plants from the Appalachian Mountains to the Chesapeake Bay. This corridor of native plants would provide a safe haven for insects, butterflies, and other creatures to ensure their survival and protect biodiversity because they are badly threatened by climate change.

W1. As a candidate do you believe that the City of Takoma Park should endorse this project as one of its climate change initiatives as other communities in Montgomery and Prince George's County have?

I think that is a great idea, but I would also welcome any discussion on whether there are cost implications that might make it prohibitive for us as a relatively small city. In that case, we could perhaps find ways to follow the movement in spirit, without absolute constraints on our budget.

W3. Will you advocate for an updated Open Space Management Plan that gives priority to assessing and restoring public green spaces and parks with native trees and plants?

I am interested in learning more about this discussion from our resident experts and committees.

W4. Are you open to the idea of using Dorothy's Woods as an educational and demonstration area for sustainable urban habitat and watershed management.

Certainly. I am open to the idea of using Dorothy's Woods as an educational and demonstration area for sustainable urban habitat and watershed management. I welcome a discussion on this issue.

W5. What else would you do to encourage the proliferation of native plants on public and private space in the City of Takoma Park?

I am a strong supporter of promoting native plants across the City. Several years ago, I removed many beautiful but invasive species that had been planted for years in my garden, and replaced them with native plants that create a healthy habitat for wildlife. I will work as I have in my profession, to help educate our community about the multiple positive impacts of native species, promote their uptake (using multi-pronged techniques such as encouraging certified wildlife habitats across the City as I have in my own frontyard), and much more. I welcome ideas from our resident experts on cost efficient measures we can adopt to achieve this goal.

Food Forests

FF1. Food Forests and/or Foragers Gardens (see local example in Bowie, MD - <https://www.forested.us/>) are a way to address multiple issues: 1) they improve food security and increase food sovereignty, especially for low income families; 2) they increase biodiversity; 3) they help tackle stormwater problems; and 4) they both build resilience to and mitigate the climate crisis, especially with respect to cooling. Are you willing to advocate for the City to explore what it could do to support more food forests throughout the City, both on public property, as well as to provide education and assistance to private property owners who may like to establish food forests?

I am interested to learn more about food forests in urban areas like Takoma Park. I have close friends within Takoma Park (not in Ward 5) who practice permaculture techniques in their own gardens, and have successfully grown meaningful amounts of food that feed their (relatively higher income) families. I have also seen a few examples in our City of community gardening, but I have not yet witnessed anything within our City limits on a large and more meaningful scale. This may be due to my lack of awareness. I am willing and interested in exploring these discussions to hear what ideas residents think are viable for our Takoma Park setting.