

CAC Questions for Takoma Park 2022 Candidates for Mayor and City Council

Name: Elizabeth Forbes Wallace

Candidate for Council Member, Ward 1

B1 Skills, Training, Background, Project Management

I have the tenacity to commit to a new venture, in this case the city council, with curiosity that propels me to learn “what needs to be done, who needs to do it, what’s the deadline, what can we afford, and, in the case of climate change, what can we not afford to let slide:

Education: BA in Photojournalism and Soviet and East European Studies, Newhouse School of Communications/Syracuse University.

Project Management: Every business goes through four phases of a life cycle: start up, growth, maturity and renewal/rebirth or decline.

Start Up: In 1975 at the age of twenty-two I founded a passport and visa processing company (Visa Advisors). I had a one room office, a wooden desk from my Dad’s office, a bike, my sister’s hand-me-down car and a three thousand dollar loan from my mother.

Growth: In 1980 I was the first in my industry to purchase a word processor (\$15K in those days); compile the travel document procedures from almost 1K embassies and consulates in the USA; and publish a hard copy subscription for corporations and travel agents.

In 1984 when Egghead software was the only place for consumer software, I designed, with a programmer, a processing system that tracked every phone call with a client, every dime that was paid in visa fees to Embassies and the State Department, every customer name, passport and their vaccination information, itinerary and more. These programs generated schedules for couriers to go to up to eighty embassies a day, itemized invoices to capture all expenses of over two hundred and fifty thousand applications over time, printed airbills for FedEx, and generated reports to track profit and loss, travel trends and more.

Maturity: In 1985 I expanded operations to New York City and also created online databases for an airline (TWA), a worldwide travel agency (Thomas Cook) and a digital

media company (AOL) and keep them all updated. I taught at a travel school and continued to fine tune operations.

Hard times when international travel was affected (Gulf War in 1990, 911 in 2001) meant making hard decisions, cutting back, and running lean. When developers arrived in Dupont Circle, it was time to move and regroup due to high rent and we became even more efficient with less.

Except for purchasing equipment, we did not borrow money from a bank ever.

Rebirth: In 2004 I prepared all the due diligence documentation and sold it at a good time for seven figures.

Running a business is not for the faint of heart. The average lifespan is less than 10 years. Mine was 29 years with a profitable end.

The same mindset that molded this entrepreneur into a three-decade business owner is also needed on the Takoma Park City Council. The Ward 1 seat needs someone who is a critical thinker, insists on a Plan B, questions ambiguity, is humble in the search for knowledge, admits when they are wrong, says no to projects that don't make sense feasibly or fiscally and researches topics out of curiosity as well as necessity.

Most importantly she is someone who asks for help from the best (like CAC, Takoma Stormwater Solutions, Pollinators, Community Food Forest and others); is always open to seeing another perspective, and does not presume to know everything.

As I equipped my staff with the newest technologies, so must the city council set policy on the dais that includes equipping staff with the right equipment and training, reskilling and upskilling when necessary, to make sure we are all wearing climate change and social justice lenses.

When it comes to Takoma Park City Council, I will do everything to make sure the council receives timely, monthly, accurate fiscal information for budgeting. I will do everything to make sure we are updated regarding the projects to which we have allocated funds, their goals, their timelines. When they are met and when we are behind. So we run lean while maintaining our priority to keep our residents safe.

B1 Climate Change Experience

Climate change is the lens through which we need to make every decision and track our future successes, and maybe failures, with good metrics and reporting.

My climate experience is an informal education. I was an intern for Citizens Climate Lobby and lobbied on Capitol Hill. I read constantly. I hear stories from friends how fire and floods affected them and changed their lives forever. I attend lectures at Carnegie Institute.

I've learned from Airbnb guests in my home: marine biologists from California and Ireland, storm chasers from NOAA, Dutch interns who described their stormwater problems and solutions.

Most recently I've worked with people in the space industry (aerospace students, educators, a commercial astronaut, etc) on short term projects to design a university and habitats on the Moon under the auspices of MMAARS and The Human Space Program. Planning for survival in extreme environments (no water, no air) helped me think more and more about how we have to do that here and now. That's why I turned my focus this year back to Earth and Takoma Park.

When I need to learn, I will search for answers everywhere. I will do so with climate change as well.

For example, I wanted to learn more about law enforcement when I learned of problems on the TPPD force. I took the Citizens Police Academy, joined the chief's advisory board and earned a certificate from the 911 Dispatch Academy so I could understand how things could go wrong from the initial call for help. I also took two criminal justice courses at Montgomery College before they were cut short by COVID.

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:

I wouldn't want it otherwise. I need mentors. You need political will. You deserve

- *To have your voices heard at the podium, in work groups and through thorough reading of your reports.*
- *To have your ideas discussed, commented on and not have them disappear into a bureaucratic black hole.*
- *To be given a reasonable timeframe for a response.*

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?

First I'd ask for your help to prioritize projects based on what has already been decided by the council and to see what holes there are in the logic and execution. And then let's go from there.

How will you effectively coordinate climate and environmental adaptation and mitigation strategies across all City Departments?

The coordination of the strategies is the purview of the city manager. However, I would insist that the council receive accurate and timely data on every project, have the information available on the city website OR links to a website created by a local citizen committee so that the data is updated accurately and as immediately as possible. It starts with making sure we have good data, good metrics and good, honest, non judgmental communication.

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?

Good leaders surround themselves with people who have more knowledge than they. I would ask the council to gather all of those in our community who have already mastered tackling food insecurity, etc, identify best practices, and develop a game plan. We need to cooperate ACROSS disciplines and share knowledge. No silos.

Also, the US Climate Resilience Toolkit made available on Climate.gov would be a good starting point from which to create a workbook usable by citizens recruited from current workgroups and more whom I've met by going door-to-door. (Thanks to Sabrina Eaton for this resource.) The suggested framework could help us document climate hazards we care about most, prioritize which situations we want to avoid and come up with workable solutions to mitigate risks that are climate related.

1. [Understand exposure](#)
2. [Assess vulnerability and risk](#)
3. [Investigate options](#)
4. [Prioritize and Plan](#)
5. [Take Action](#)

When we don't have a lot of time, as we don't with climate change, it might be best to use best practices from another source and customize as we go along.

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?

My Door to Door Education: I'm taking the first steps now. This afternoon, I passed a vacant house with animals living in it, visited a home upon which a tree had fallen, knocked on the front door of a house from which you could smell mold coming from within. The door to one house with decrepit stairs was opened by a man who could hardly walk. His wife reached out to me later via email to come help them and I will be there on Tuesday afternoon. I learn as I go.

Person to Person: For example, I met an 80 year old woman who is proud she does recycling but wants to do more. Perhaps our first recruit? Another resident who leads recycled art classes was turned away by the Rec Dept for use of the rooms. I'd re-encourage her participation by making it possible for her to teach but also use her real estate skills to join a committee on the NH community center.

Besides the citizen created website, I'd also use bus stop panels to more effectively communicate information via infographics; have meet and greets in apartment lobbies with activities for kids and introduce new foods from the food forests. Make the city council meetings more interactive at the beginning and have school or scout groups present their findings, get their badges, etc. Give kids voices to make them proud of their accomplishments on the larger stage. They can even do mini docs with their iphones and have a short film festival.

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?

Yes. Perhaps your groups could come up with a job description for them based on what might have worked or not in the past and compare it with similar descriptions from other cities and states.

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?

Some of the suggestions above address this. First hire a coordinator or maybe have a volunteer from CAC to step in until one is found. But also that we should have a short review perhaps every other week at the city council with suggestions for the community to focus on. And look for the anomalies, always. And we need to ensure the city website has staff to comb through and update or a link to a TP Climate Action site that volunteers can maintain.

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?

Absolutely. I particularly liked Somersent's SIP venture. However, I also talked to a neighbor who complained that another neighbor had diverted ALL the rainwater from their gutters into one flow into his backyard. When he told them there was a gully in his yard, they didn't care. Neither were nearby neighbors concerned with his plight. It may be a very tentative uphill battle and be ready to have mediators on the sidelines. Sometimes neighbors are too unwilling to be 'impolite' and that may deter progress.

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

I'm sorry, I am not familiar with the area yet and look forward to learning.

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

I'd need to know the particulars first however, we might need to take a look at whether or not there are insurance policies that already cover or could cover errors made, not out of intent or negligence, but out of where we all are on the learning curve.

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?

We knew better and we didn't do better. I don't know if it was ever discussed that either 1/ it could be built elsewhere or 2/ it could be split into smaller sub libraries or any other solution. It may be too late now. But we can at least have a Plan B: ensure that there is a 2nd library perhaps at the NH community center and if we have a say, one at the Adventist and perhaps one in a storefront at Langley Crossroads.

S5. Would you support a Citizens task force on stormwater to help the City prepare a strategic plan for stormwater management?

Absolutely.

Have you read our Takoma Stormwater Solutions' *PROPOSED PLAN FOR DEVELOPING A STORMWATER RESILIENCE STRATEGIC PLAN IN TAKOMA PARK*?¹ Can you comment on it?

Not yet. I apologize. If any reader wants to contact your site or mine directly in a few days, I'll be in a better position to comment. I know you want to get this posted today.

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

It is a serious responsibility to do so. This includes the businesses and apartment buildings as well who have large areas of impermeable pavement. Some have basements that are affected and even use them as living quarters (ADA or person) . Mold is dangerous to everyone's health. We need to take the stigma away from having it in one's home and support remediation. We need to encourage them to open their doors and find a way to help them bring their homes to health.

I have been in educational outreach for many years and would look forward to supporting that. Often there is one person in the community that it the best communicator like a griot in West Africa, it could be anyone from a pastor to a teacher to a clerk at the local bodega. As Malcolm Gladwell says in "The Tipping Point," the best way to understand (or effect) the emergence of an idea, a message or change a behavior, it starts like starts and spreads like viruses do. We need to "infect" "the connectors" and get them to spread the word.

Wildlife Corridor & Native Plants

Many of you have heard of Doug Tallamy's Homegrown National Park movement² 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?

Yes, it sounds exciting. While not the same, I've been inspired by what my Dutch visitors have shown me they've accomplished as well.

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

² <https://homegrownnationalpark.org/>

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?

Yes. However, I'd also like to learn which ones will be most resilient as the southern heat creeps north over the next couple of decades so that they will be hardy enough to withstand the new temperatures. Perhaps they need to be native to points farther south as well?

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.

Yes, I'd be open to that. I enjoyed spending my time there this past weekend and found a box turtle! What joy to see one again and share it with children. But how to manage it? I'd like to introduce you to a paper on Collective Action and the Urban Commons whose findings would support that. The author suggests an enabling role for "state and local governments (which) could provide incentives and lend support to private actors who are able to overcome free-riding and coordination problems to manage collective resources." Contact me at connecttakoma.com for more information.

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

Public: Start with getting a list of all places that stock such plants, have conversations with the owners, find out what volume they need to make it profitable for them and go from there with the information to see what we'd need to do to meet that.

Private: Same as above but also door to door offering plantings. Some people are hesitant to work in their yards. Take them outside, dig a hole and just teach them to enjoy getting their hands dirty. Together.

Connect Takoma: When we connect, we care.