



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

### Randy Gibson, Candidate for City Council, Ward 3

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.

We ask candidates to provide succinct answers addressing these questions.

### 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 career of public service focused on social/economic health and wellbeing. I served as a Peace Corps volunteer, Director of an Illinois-based community and economic development organization, senior staff to a pioneering Fairtrade organization, NGO grant writer, Planning Consultant at AARP, South Asia Regional Coordinator for SAWSO, and Management Analyst at USDA. My skill sets include strategic planning,*

*performance management, training and grant writing. Over the last 3 years, I have provided volunteer leadership to Takoma Park Mobilization/ Climate Action Coffee focused on education and on-the-ground efforts to address ecosystem and stormwater challenges. I have a Master's Degree in Political Science from Illinois State University. I bring nearly 30 years of neighborhood and community involvement with the passion, experience and time to work for all Takoma Park residents and our shared habitat.*

## 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?

*Foundational to a climate and environmental policy is a both an understanding of our capacity to transition away from fossil fuels and a clear understanding of the services and benefits provided by our ecosystems and watersheds. To this end, I would promote a comprehensive assessment of the health and quality of the ecosystems in our public parks and greenspaces. Both the City's Park Quality, Proximity and Race Assessment and preliminary Open Space Management Plans miss any strategic focus on our ecosystems and watersheds. A comprehensive assessment of parks and public greenspaces that includes ecosystem health and benefits is also needed to provide needed context for the Open Space Management Plan now under consideration.*

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?

*As noted in C1 above we need to tackle climate and environmental challenges in a coordinated and systemic way working across city departments, looking at both public and private property and infrastructure. (From C1), One promising strategy is the promotion of various models of conservation landscaping, pollinator gardens and other forms of green infrastructure on both public and private property. This would help residents learn what they can do to help mitigate climate impacts and biodiversity losses.*

*Efforts to mitigate the impacts of Increased rainfall have to be studied at both a watershed and sub-watershed level with urgent emphasis on those areas of our city already facing flooding, erosion and related impacts. The expensive and dangerous impacts of stormwater are felt most keenly in sub-watershed at the bottom of hills and valleys that may have limited ability to alter the problem. The City, in partnership with other entities, including civic and neighborhood groups, should be in a position to*

*encourage shared mitigation and resilience strategies with residents at the top and bottom of watershed basins through education, technical support and financial incentives to those with limited resources. The City has been provided valuable resources by Climate Action Coffee/Takoma Stormwater Solutions on a strategic planning framework and shared environmental services (PES) that the City would be wise to consider.*

*Regarding increased heat from climate change, the importance to tree cover is clear. The City should prioritize those areas and wards for additional tree plantings. Regarding food insecurity, higher food costs are likely a result of climate change as crops are impacted and transportation costs go up. Growing food closer to home in the city, county and region should be encouraged. Food forest plantings on private and public lands are useful part of that effort. Lastly, as a City let us commit to protect and nourish our soil through conservation landscaping and habitat restoration.*

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?

*The environmental, social and economic challenges facing the City are too big for City staff to do alone. Concerned residents and local expertise should be sought out in a proactive and coordinated way. Yes, I would support designating one or more staff person(s) with specific responsibility to help coordinate and work with community and resident-led adaptation and mitigation partnerships. Policies may be needed that make outreach to and partnering with relevant community, business, and neighborhood groups a norm, not the exception.*

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?

*Yes, of course our Climate Action Plans should change as performance is regularly measured against targets and conditions change. I will seek to clarify the status of each of our goals, strategies and performance measures. Evidence-based data must be used to guide us.*

## 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?

*See C2 above. Serious flood and erosion areas must be addressed comprehensively and will likely involve public and private property and infrastructure. (From C2: The City, in partnership with other entities, including civic and neighborhood groups, should be in a position to encourage shared mitigation and resilience strategies with residents at the top and bottom of watersheds through education, technical support and financial incentives to those with limited resources. If appropriate. I would support reasonable levels of funding for environmental services collaborations.*

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

*See C2 above. In addition to education, technical support and financial incentives to those with limited resources, urgent professional consultations and assessments need to be obtained that focus on these high-risk areas.*

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

*Rigorous environmental review of all City projects is a must and all larger projects should involve outside professional peer reviews. Projects such as the seriously flawed Junction plan and building a library on a floodplain must be avoided*

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?

*See S3 above*

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?*<sup>1</sup> Can you comment on it?

*The TSS SW Proposed Plan referred is a thoughtful, well documented and professional document that should be required reading for all Council Members (Stormwater Board) and related City staff. The urgent and critical nature of our climate emergency demands that the Stormwater Board take action now and the Proposed Plan provides an excellent guide*

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

*The health, safety and well-being of our residents should be a concern if not a responsibility of the City. Stormwater issues are clearly part of that responsibility. As noted earlier, many stormwater issues start uphill and impact those below. Resident*

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<sup>1</sup> TSS Proposed Plan ... - [https://drive.google.com/file/d/1N6AE--z-2BpiLQkK-8xNkluPuekpN95/\\_view](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1N6AE--z-2BpiLQkK-8xNkluPuekpN95/_view)

*education and incentives to mitigate stormwater problems in effected neighborhoods should be adopted as simply good business strategy by the City. To leverage those outreach and education efforts partnerships with civic and neighborhood associations should always be considered.*

## Wildlife Corridor & Native Plants

Many of you have heard of Doug Tallamy's Homegrown National Park movement<sup>2</sup> 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?

*This relatively inexpensive initiative is good for our ecosystems and great for civic engagement. Yes, I endorse this effort. I would further encourage partnering with local environmental groups like Climate Action Coffee and Friends of Sligo Creek.*

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?

*As noted in C!: A comprehensive assessment of parks and public greenspaces that includes ecosystem health and benefits is also needed to provide needed context for the Open Space Management Plan now under consideration*

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.

*This City-owned and resident supported 2.68 acre woodland parcel called Dorothy's Woods includes a degraded basketball court at its base. Removal of the asphalt along with native plant restoration of a once wetland meadow can demonstrate effective ecosystem support and watershed management. Signage would help educate residents about the project and its benefits, providing a model to other areas in the city frequently wet or flooded. Climate Action Coffee has presented to the Council a volunteer led and funded proposal to do this in partnership with the City.*

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<sup>2</sup> <https://homegrownnationalpark.org/>

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 would encourage regular use of City communication channels such as the Newsletter, website and signage to get the message out. Partnering with local environmental groups is a must. A commitment to the use of native trees, shrubs and plants on city parks and property reflected in signage would amplify the message.*

## 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?

*Yes, I would strongly advocate that the City explore opportunities for food forests on public and private lands including outreach, education and technical assistance for residents. The City should consider partnering with individual property owners and environmental groups . Soil preparation, planting and maintenance issues will need to be considered. Let's also consult with other jurisdictions and organizations to learn from their efforts.*

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