

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

Seth Grimes, candidate for Mayor, sethgrimes.org.

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 will bring strong skills and deep experience in personnel and project management, budgeting, communications, community organizing, and government service – and an exceptional local legislative record – to the Takoma Park mayor’s office. Looking beyond professional qualification, I have a proven record getting things done locally. I wrote Takoma Park environmental legislation, working closely with expert community members, consultants, and city staff. And as a Takoma Park Mobilization co-founder (and current vice president), I have had a hand in building structures that tap the energy and passions of residents across our community.

To quote climate hawk Mike Tidwell, *"Seth understands environmental challenges, and he knows how to make local government work. As mayor, he will make Climate Action a top city priority. That is why I'm backing Seth Grimes for Mayor of Takoma Park."*

My skill – my practical experience – is in recognizing worthwhile, doable ideas and making them happen by collaborating to devise strategy, building coalitions, advocacy, and persistence.

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?

Climate Change is a global challenge that we must address at all levels, including locally. I will ensure that Climate Action is a top city priority, building on my record as a Takoma council member and community advocate.

To increase drawdown and sequestration, we need more and healthier trees (native species) plus plantings to replace grass; healthier soil; and waste diversion and expanded composting, and of course I would consult local experts on other approaches. Trees and plantings help with stormwater and trees help with cooling – mitigation elements – and providing stormwater-treatment assistance for private property and restoring streambeds will also help. On the waste front: As a 2019-20 member of the Takoma Park Committee on the Environment, I drafted a proposal for a [Takoma Park Zero Waste Initiative](#) that I would move forward.

Regarding my record, I will again quote Mike Tidwell:

"Seth drafted Takoma Park's polystyrene food serviceware ban and wrote a bill expanding recycling. He worked with activists to ban cosmetic lawn-care pesticide use and helped pass a countywide ban. He promoted curbside food-waste pickup for composting and advanced Takoma Park's environmental sustainability agenda. He has spoken out for fossil-fuels divestment, solar expansion, and watershed and the urban forest protections."

Each of these accomplishments involved collaboration and consensus building across diverse roles and constituencies including activists, experts, consultants, staff, and of course my council colleagues. They involved inclusive community outreach. To advance climate and environmental initiatives locally, what's most needed from Takoma Park's mayor is buy-in, commitment, and organizing skill and energy. All that is what I will deliver.

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?

Trees, stormwater management, food forests – and outreach, education, incentives, project funding, and buyers’ clubs – with community, nonprofit, and intergovernmental partnerships – are tickets to boosting community resilience.

I should mention that I’ve worked to combat food insecurity for years, including as a:

- six-year board member at Shepherd’s Table and weekly volunteer for three years,
- member of the Montgomery County Board of Social Services,
- member of the Montgomery County Food Council’s Environmental Impact Working Group, and
- founding 2016 advisor to Small Things Matter’s Kokua Foods program and a bimonthly food-recovery and distribution volunteer.

Through this work and community advocacy around topics including policing, justice, and immigration reform, I have built a wide network of contacts at advocacy, tenants, and community organizations and in Maryland and Montgomery County government.

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?

One step would be to reestablish a city Environment Committee along past models, to both advise the council and lead actual efforts, and to work in partnership with initiatives such as the Climate Action Coffee and its subgroups and Friends of Native Trees in Takoma, however with special attention to inclusion of individuals from diverse backgrounds. I would study what specially designated staff could accomplish and the cost.

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?

Climate Action Plans should be living documents, but unfortunately Takoma Park’s is... stale. Our [Environmental] Sustainability Manager had done a good job creating, implementing, and expanding on the climate programs, but we need a fresh look that incorporates residents recommendations and expertise, which have been discounted in recent years. And the City Council needs to implement steps outlined in its [2020 Climate Emergency Response Framework Resolution](#). It’s disappointing and

disconcerting that the council hasn't enacted climate legislation in the two-and-one-half years since it passed that resolution.

I note that both my mayoral opponents voted Against the framework, and neither has proposed alternative city climate legislation nor done any work to remediate the deficiencies they saw in the framework.

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 would consider grants, matching funds, and technical and in-kind assistance.

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

Step #1 to addressing flooding is risk reduction via stormwater and groundwater infrastructure improvement. Simultaneously, we'll need risk and impact assessments, to understand the sources, likelihood, and severity of threats. Step #3 is emergency planning in cooperation with property owners, community members, and other local jurisdictions and investigation of federal, state, and other financial, technical, and humanitarian support. We also, Step #4, to make sure that buildings are in good shape to survive flooding damage. I'd be particularly concerned about large apartment buildings near Sligo Creek such as the Essex House.

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

Assessment and threat reduction should be an integral part of project design and planning.

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?

Library floodplain concerns are valid. I'll say that, again, I'm more concerned about large apartment buildings near Sligo Creek such as the Essex House.

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*?² Can you comment on it?

Yes and Yes. I don't have any comments on the Stormwater Resilience Strategic Plan proposal other than that I appreciate and value the work.

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

The City's role is to ensure that residents, businesses, and property owners are educated and incentivized to mitigate stormwater on their property. The city should pursue this through nonprofit, intergovernmental, and community partnerships and via use of the city staff and resources.

I note that Takoma Stormwater Solutions (TSS) itself "envision[s] a partnership between TSS, the City Stormwater Board, City Staff and committees, private consultants, and impacted stakeholders (residents, business owners, other governmental entities, and non-governmental organizations) that can fulfill the ultimate goal of both developing and implementing a strategic plan for stormwater impact resilience in the face of climate change." Sounds good!

Wildlife Corridor & Native Plants

Many of you have heard of Doug Tallamy's Homegrown National Park movement³ 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?

As mayor, I will schedule public discussion of project endorsement as one of the city's climate change initiatives, and I would likely support project endorsement.

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.

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 informally advised proponents including Randy Gibson and Karen Elrich, in 2021-1, on ways to get the city to agree to this sort of work.

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 education efforts through partnerships and direct city efforts – I'm thinking of the city's past campaigns around alternatives to synthetic chemical pesticides as part of the Safe Grow initiative – I wrote the city's 2014 Safe Grow lawn care pesticide ban – and a city commitment to native species.

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.