

Newton Conservators

2025 Newton Candidate Questionnaire

Respondent: John Chaimanis

Office Sought: Ward 4 City Councilor At-Large

Question 1:

What are your top 2 or 3 goals and/or objectives from the Newton Open Space Plan:2020-2027 (see pages 147-150 for the Plan's Goals and Objectives) and what do you plan to do to promote them? (FYI, a priority of Newton Conservators, relating to Objective 6C on page 150, is to complete overdue and future Conservation Restrictions in a timely manner.) Are there items that you believe are missing from either the open space plan or conservation discussions in our community, and how would you address that? (400 words or less)

Response:

My top three priorities from the Newton Open Space Plan 2020-2027 are Goal 2 (Maintenance and Improvement), Goal 6 (Protection), and Goal 4 (Minimized Gaps in Availability of Open Space Resources). These align with community needs for healthier, more equitable green spaces amid growth and climate challenges.

For Goal 2, I'll advocate for increased funding through Community Preservation Act grants and public-private partnerships to upgrade athletic fields, trails, and playgrounds, while enhancing native habitats and urban canopy. As a councilor, I'll push for a master plan assessing facilities, prioritizing invasive species removal and stormwater management to boost ecological health. On Goal 6, protecting our open spaces is crucial. I'll promote Objective 6C by collaborating with the Newton Conservators to expedite overdue and future Conservation Restrictions, ensuring timely legal protections for high-value parks and conservation lands. I'll also support strategies for private parcels like golf courses, balancing development with preservation via easements or acquisitions.

For Goal 4, I'll focus on equity by expanding resources in Environmental Justice areas and heat islands, adding playgrounds and paths where gaps exist. I'll work with city departments to integrate open space into zoning reforms, ensuring new developments include public green areas.

The plan is robust, but it could emphasize youth education on conservation and stronger integration with climate action plans. I'd address this by proposing school partnerships for environmental programs and tying open space funding to Newton's Climate Action Plan for resilient designs. Together, these steps will safeguard our natural assets for all residents.

Question 2:

The climate crisis is one of the biggest detrimental impacts on our open spaces. How would you accelerate or add to the actions recommended in both the Newton Climate Action Plan: A Living Plan for 2020-2025 (focused on reducing greenhouse gases) and the Newton Climate Vulnerability Assessment and Action Plan (focused on changes to protect natural resources and reduce effects of extreme weather events)? (400 words or less)

Response:

I have built a career working to fight climate change, using finance as a tool. The company which I founded has now built enough solar to power approximately 25,000 homes, we have taken cities net zero, and I have lectured at and consulted with higher education institutions on the topic. The action plan is strong and there could be areas for enhancement, however I think that execution and collaboration with existing stakeholders is key at this stage.

Strengthening Resilience (Climate Vulnerability Assessment):

1. Safeguard Natural Resources: Partnering with the Newton Conservators, I'd advocate for protecting 25% more open space by 2030, focusing on wetland restoration to combat flooding, a critical vulnerability in Newton as well as increasing our tree canopy. Doing this in conjunction with the tree ordinance and Protect Newton Trees is a practical way to achieve this goal while rallying a diverse group of stakeholders.
2. Work with Landowners: Change is incremental and educating the public about their rights to initiate conservation easements on their property and assisting them is a practical way to leverage individual landowners
3. Community-Driven Action: Building on my success in stakeholder engagement, I'd host monthly climate workshops to boost participation, inspired by the 2019 workshops. I'd ensure resources are directed to low-income areas for flood-resistant infrastructure and tree-planting initiatives, promoting environmental justice.

Enhancing Greenhouse Gas Reduction (Climate Action Plan):

1. Scale Renewable Installation and Procurement: Renewables are our best way to offset consumption of carbon emitting sources. We should continue to pursue cost-effective installations that do not impact open spaces. There be practical limitations with installing solar to meet all of our needs, and there are cost effective attractive options to procure power from nearby solar projects through community solar and PPA arrangements which need to be explored.
2. Energy Efficiency Measures: Increasing the energy efficiency of the built environment is a meaningful way to reduce carbon emission. Working with MassSave to encourage every homeowner to conduct free energy audits and receive incentives to perform cost effective building retrofits is a great way to advance action towards our goals. Consider increasing new

construction efficiency standards – including smart design standards such as strategic placement of windows and shading to maximize heat gain in the winter and natural light.

3. Electrification: Working with utilities we can work to cost effectively expand incentives for heat pump installations and EV chargers. We can also improve EV-ready codes for new buildings.

Question 3:

Do you believe current funding levels in the City budget are sufficient to maintain high quality open space and address growing climate mitigation needs? If not, what would you do about it? (400 words or less)

Response:

The City budget has many competing and important priorities. In order to increase in any single area, we have to cut from another. Our Open Spaces and Climate Action Plans have many overlaps in objectives and actions, and ensuring tight collaboration across the two will leverage efforts. Newton's open spaces face increasing pressures from extreme weather, invasive species, and urban development, while climate action requires urgent investments in resilience measures like flood barriers and carbon sequestration. Recent assessments, including the City's Climate Vulnerability Plan, highlight funding gaps that could lead to degraded ecosystems if unaddressed.

To bridge this, I would prioritize collaborative strategies to amplify existing. First, I'd foster partnerships with local stakeholders such as the Newton Conservators, Green Newton, Mothers Out Front Newton, Bike Newton, Newton Community Farm, and Friends groups (e.g., Friends of Nahanton Park, Friends of Webster Woods, Friends of Kennard Conservation Area, and Friends of Houghton Garden). These organizations already contribute through volunteer stewardship and advocacy; we'd co-develop joint initiatives, like expanding volunteer-led trail maintenance programs that have preserved areas like Cold Spring Park.

Other ways to increase funding include pursuing state and federal grants collaboratively—e.g., applying for Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs funding with Green Newton for urban forestry projects, which could add thousands of trees to enhance carbon capture. Another way to increase funding is launching community fundraising campaigns, inspired by successful models from Mass Audubon, could generate supplemental funds.

Lastly, I'd advocate for public-private partnerships (PPP), such as teaming with local businesses for sponsorships of resilience projects, like wetland restoration in the Charles River watershed

alongside the Charles River Watershed Association. Other examples of PPP include private companies paying for energy efficiency upgrades or clean energy installations in exchange for an shared energy saving performance contract or a power purchase agreement (PPA) which guarantees savings.

By leveraging these collaborations and my experience in building cross-functional teams, we can stretch existing dollars further, ensuring Newton's open spaces remain vibrant and climate-resilient for future generations.