

Newton Conservators

2025 Newton Candidate Questionnaire

Respondent: Cyrus Dahmubed

Office Sought: Ward 4 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:

Open spaces and ecosystems work as interconnected networks and so all six of the Goals and all 20 of the Objectives laid out are crucial to achieving a robust and effective open space strategy because they support each other. In addition to the Conservators' prioritization of legal protections, as appropriate, for Conservation and Park parcels, my top goals/objectives are:

Objective 1A: creating a Strategic Implementation. The planning work that has been done so far is great, but won't get us very far without implementation. I'd seek to grow our revenue and partner with those who want to bring business to Newton to help fund this.

Objective 2E: increasing street and park tree canopy throughout the City, especially in Environmental Justice communities. This is fundamental for restoring the health and biodiversity of our local ecosystem by creating an interconnected natural network that allows pollinators and other fauna to do their job as nature's mobile links, while directly improving health, wellbeing, and comfort. I'd seek to enhance review of and limit tree removal in Environmental Justice communities, Historic Districts, and other areas, while working with proposed construction projects to identify areas in projects for new plantings that can maximize their impact as connectors and environmental contributors.

Goal 3: Accessibility, and its objectives of increasing accessibility to and in the City's Park, Conservation, and open space resources, including providing accessible parking. Our open spaces benefit everyone through the air and water they keep livable for us, but making sure everyone can access the benefits that come with actually being in nature is our responsibility. I'd

use my background as a designer to prioritize innovative design solutions that can enhance equitable accessibility, while maintaining a low-impact environmental touch.

I'd aim to expand our regional conservation cooperation by building on existing regional planning and engaging in new, bigger picture thinking with our municipal neighbors. The Open Space Plan touches on the impact of dams on our natural environment. I'd support further exploration of the restoration of natural waterway habitats that are currently hardened and managed in a way that reduces their resilience, and the opportunity this presents to create new and improved open spaces. Finally, I'd support efforts toward more sustainable private yards like reducing gas-powered landscaping tools, encouraging native plantings, limiting pesticides and chemical fertilizers, and restoring topsoil through decreased leaf removal.

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:

An important part of how we fund and achieve our climate goals is how we use our land; by allowing for highly sustainable buildings that can house more people while using less land area, we can have a lighter touch on the environment.

In addition to the CAP's recommendation to require new buildings with a certain roof area to install solar PV where technically possible (B.2.1), I'd support efforts to require buildings above a certain size achieve higher environmental performance and human wellbeing standards like Phius (formerly Passive House) and WELL, and require new buildings to be all-electric, thereby also advancing recommendation D.3. I'd seek to decrease the cost of solar PV and other building performance adaptations for residents, especially in Environmental Justice communities where climate change and poor building performance have an outsized impact on health and wellbeing. I'd support an ideas competition, like Boston's recent "Triple Decker Challenge", to advance creative ideas for energy retrofits can create shared community benefits.

Retrofitting Newton Housing Authority properties with solar PV through the State's SMART program (recommendation B.2.3) should serve as a catalyst for addressing deferred maintenance, introducing Green Infrastructure, and completing other retrofits for improved performance as recommended in the Vulnerability Assessment. We can eliminate the burning of

toxic carbon-based fuels at these sites, improve performance, and lower operating costs. I'd encourage strategies for NHA properties to include outdoor spaces for each unit, as some already do, to support active living, social connectedness, and open space access.

To support the CAP's C.2 goal of incentivizing a transition to electric vehicles, I'd encourage new construction to limit provided parking (if any) to electric vehicles, especially if building in the village centers. I'd also advance recommendation C.4 by proposing a free express bus pilot program to increase awareness and use of Newton's express buses. I'd work with our State delegates and the MBTA to improve the accessibility and reliability of our commuter rail stations, which will help facilitate better, faster, and lower-emission regional transit connections long term. To accelerate a number of goals, including reduction of GHG emissions from disposal, I'd support a municipal compost pilot, restarting our rain barrel program to help with stormwater management, and other tactical but impactful programs that can have direct benefits for residents.

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 Goals and Objectives of the Open Space Plan recognize that "municipal resources have always been and will continue to be limited" (p. 147). But that doesn't mean we have to accept the status quo. The Council can work to increase revenue by encouraging new housing and commercial growth, especially in village centers where denser living decreases land use/person and vehicle miles/person, and increases access to less polluting transportation options. It also creates key opportunities for creating more sustainable buildings, and investing in making our historic building stock more sustainable and resilient.

Efforts to restore our native ecosystems are also crucial to the smart utilization of resources. Native ecosystems and habitats are resilient and self-managing. They survive well with minimal intervention, but thrive with focused and thoughtful investments that work in harmony with natural systems. I'd support a watershed-based approach to understanding how our place in the region, wrapped on three sides by the Charles River and crisscrossed by a complex web of tributaries, means we need a more thoughtful approach to water management and one that works in much better harmony with native habitats. This could mean further utilizing State funds to prioritize the elimination of unused mill dams, which threaten Newton with flooding and create hardened edges that are unable to withstand storms and a changing environment.

Tied together with the goals of our open space strategy, this could create new opportunities for better unifying our open spaces, making them more interconnected and accessible for everyone.

Working with our neighbors is always the right answer, and we can undertake this work inspired by the natural systems around us, which do not recognize municipal boundaries. Implementing a regional approach, developed in dialogue with Boston, Watertown, Waltham, Weston, Wellesley, Needham, and Dedham, and that builds on the work of the MAPC and others, we can be strategic about how targeted investments at or near Newton's borders can have their value maximized in a "whole greater than the sum of its parts" strategy. Such spaces can also help build community across municipal borders and foster a culture of productive collaboration.

I'd also look to grow funding through partnerships with those that want to bring business to Newton, exploring how shared goals for creating beautiful and resilient environments to work and live in can encourage investments in our environment and sustainable construction/development practices.