

Newton Conservators

2025 Newton Candidate Questionnaire

Respondent: Lisa Rachelle Teusch Gordon

Office Sought: Ward 6 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:

All stated goals and objectives are critical to Newton's future, and it would be a privilege to implement all of them; however, my top choices are Connectivity, Protection, and Maintenance & Improvement.

I would work to increase visibility to these important issues through community meetings, both broad and targeted email & digital outreach, and increased engagement around the goals and objectives. I'd like to see more residents engaged in our open space and conservation dialogue. Education around our local wildlife, indigenous plantings, and the need for pollinator gardens throughout Newton could make for an excellent series of short films that could be hosted on the City website.

I also favor a "response strategy" or guide for when large, privately owned open spaces come up for sale. Lastly, we should be looking to record all publicly owned trees and their health, with an eye towards replacing the public tree canopy that we lost to the invasive Hemlock woolly adelgid, and treating any surviving trees to ensure we maintain the Eastern Hemlock, our local, indigenous tree.

Regarding items missing from the open space plan and conservation discussions in our community, I would note the need for a holistic biodiversity-plan for Newton:

A biodiversity plan would serve as a reference guide for policymakers and interested parties. These include but are not limited to determining the amount of green space needed in new housing projects, the continued and sustained preservation of small parks, and how to enhance

the standard of living for all Newton residents, including access to fresh food through community gardens.

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:

Newton has several plans, as mentioned above, and some legislation to address climate change. However, a critical gap in the Climate Action Plan is the failure to address the issue of green space: how to preserve it, and how to incentivize developers to incorporate more of it. While initiatives to build more energy-efficient homes, reduce car emissions, and increase access to solar power are vital, a more holistic approach would also include a biodiversity plan, as mentioned above.

The Newton Climate Action Plan has received much deserved attention, but Newton's Climate Change Vulnerability Assessment and Action Plan is not mentioned as much. This report is key to ensuring we take an integrated, whole-of-issue systems approach to climate change, assess the systems we currently have in place, and then make assessments concerning our future needs. For instance, we know that too many of our residents frequently suffer from flooding in their yards and basements, and that our sewer systems have backflow issues into streets and basements when there is heavy rain in a short period of time. As part of the adaptation strategies and mitigation efforts in the plan, we could be collecting data from our residents. An easy reporting mechanism that residents could use to track where basement flooding, backyard flooding, and sewer backups are happening, and their causes, could help us predict the impacts of our changing climate and landscape. It would be easy to implement on the City website.

Neighborhoods in Newton have started having open houses to answer questions about more efficient heating and cooling upgrades. This is a great start. The City could also do more to help with finding funding for these upgrades, especially for our lower-income residents and those on fixed incomes.

Finally, when people do upgrade to heat pumps and stop using window air conditioners, the City of Newton could arrange for those air conditioners to go to our more vulnerable populations who may not have cooling in their homes. Our recycling center is full of air units

that may still be working. Facilitating the continued use of the newer energy-saving ones might just save someone's life.

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:

This is a very important area of our City budget, and there is much work to be done to ensure we can balance all of the competing needs that should be funded. As Newton has a strong mayor model of local government, the mayor decides what to fund; the City Council can lower an amount but not add to the budget.

Because of my work in social justice and food insecurity, I see that other communities in Massachusetts utilize state and federal grants and earmarks. Newton could be doing a lot more to secure funding toward our open space and climate mitigation needs.

My background as an advocate has taught me how to highlight issues effectively and find workable solutions. I will be a tireless advocate for maintaining high-quality open space and addressing climate mitigation needs.

Some of the solutions may involve grants or looking outside of Newton to help with funding. I will work with local advocacy groups and help find grants for our community. (As a successful grant writer, I have raised hundreds of thousands of dollars for the Acton Food Pantry and would be glad to put my skills to work at home.) At the City level, it is imperative that we address issues such as flooding and sewer backflow into homes and attend to natural resources such as Crystal Lake and Bullough's Pond.