

Newton Conservators

2025 Newton Candidate Questionnaire

Respondent: Maria S. Greenberg

Office Sought: Ward 1 Ward Councilor

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:

From Newton's Open Space and Recreation Plan, three goals stand out as most important to me:

Protecting and maintaining Newton's open space resources is essential. This includes conservation areas, trails, athletic fields, playgrounds, water resources, and our urban tree canopy so they remain healthy and resilient for future generations. In Ward 1, which is considered a significant heat island area in Newton, more tree plantings and green space are a necessity. I will work with community groups, neighborhood associations, and Friends groups to highlight the importance of our open spaces and to show how their stewardship and volunteer efforts are vital to maintaining them.

Expanding access and connectivity is also a priority. Every neighborhood should have welcoming and accessible open space. Since Newton is almost fully developed, we need to be creative. Improving bike lanes and walking trails provides both recreational and ecological benefits that enhance open space connection and quality. In Newton Corner, the Mass Pike rotary remains a dangerous barrier to the Charles River and local parks. Addressing these access challenges with safe and accessible infrastructure like bike lanes, crosswalks and sidewalks would give residents more opportunities to connect with nature and for more multimodal transportation opportunities.

Finally, equity must be central to our approach. Open spaces and the amenities they provide are not evenly distributed. Ward 1, including Nonantum and Newton Corner, is identified as an

Environmental Justice area. Figure 35 of the Open Space Plan shows Ward 1 with the least public open space at seven acres per 1,000 residents, well below the national recommended standard of 15 acres. This lack of equity must be addressed.

What is missing from conservation discussions is a stronger focus on climate resilience and environmental justice. Climate change will bring more heat and flooding, and open space planning must be used to cool neighborhoods, absorb stormwater, and reduce risks. Residents of Environmental Justice areas like Ward1 should be prioritized for tree planting, park improvements, and safe connections to green space.

To address these gaps, I will continue working with city departments, local organizations, state partners, and residents to secure funding, improve transparency in project timelines, and ensure equity guides our decisions. By focusing on stewardship, access, and protection, Newton can fulfill the promise of its “Garden City” character while meeting today’s urgent climate and community needs.

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:

The climate crisis threatens Newton’s open spaces through rising temperatures, flooding, and severe weather. The city has already made progress through its Climate Action Plan and Climate Vulnerability Assessment, but we must accelerate both greenhouse gas reduction and adaptation measures.

First, on mitigation: Newton’s goal of carbon neutrality by 2050 requires bold steps in transportation, energy, and buildings. Expanding Newton Power Choice, electrifying new construction under the Electrification ordinance, and strengthening the Building Emissions Reduction and Disclosure Ordinance are essential. I support extending BERDO to large residential buildings so they meet declining emission standards. At the household level, programs like “Clean Energy Starts at Home” that promote weatherization, heat pumps, renewable energy, and EV adoption must be scaled up through outreach and funding support. Newton suffers and is at risk for increased natural gas leaks from its system of gas pipes. As reported over 80% of gas lines in Newton are leak prone. Leaks from broken or corroded pipes contribute to climate change, kill nearby trees, and pose a risk to human health and safety.

Therefore it is vital that Newton make more progress in eliminating gas lines to electrify our streets.

Second, on resilience: open spaces are natural defenses. We need more investment in green infrastructure to absorb stormwater, reduce flooding, and cool neighborhoods. The city has begun integrating stormwater upgrades, rain gardens, and pollinator plantings into infrastructure and park projects. I would accelerate this by ensuring that every new capital project is designed with climate resilience in mind, incorporating features such as rain gardens, permeable surfaces, and expanded native plantings and trees. Also, expanding our urban tree canopy, especially in heat-vulnerable neighborhoods like Nonantum and Newton Corner must remain a top priority. Trees as we know help to mitigate greenhouse gas contributions through carbon sequestration and reduces flooding with stormwater absorption.

In short, I would push Newton to move faster on building electrification, support residents in adopting clean energy, and fully integrate resilience into all infrastructure and open space decisions. By coupling emissions reduction with investments in natural systems, we can ensure Newton's open spaces continue to serve as vital community assets in the face of climate change.

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:

No, I do not believe current funding levels are sufficient to both maintain Newton's open spaces at the quality our residents expect and to meet the growing demands of climate mitigation. Parks, tree canopy, and conservation land all require steady investment, yet our open space budget has not kept pace with rising costs, increased usage, or the scale of climate challenges we now face.

To address this, I would pursue three strategies.

Secure more dedicated funding. This means advocating for a greater share of our capital plan and considering new revenue streams. For example, revisiting the state tax breaks for private golf courses could free up millions that could be redirected to open space care and climate resiliency. I would also support exploring a modest increase in the Community Preservation Act surcharge say to 1.5%, with new funds earmarked for open space and climate initiatives. I would also continue to work with our State reps and Senator to provide State funding for open space projects. I have been successful in obtaining these funds for Ward 1 projects, including Spear Community Garden, Farlow Park Pond, Pellegrini Field House, and tree plantings.

Strengthen partnerships and accountability. Collaborations with Friends groups and neighborhood associations and conservation advocates like the Newton Conservators, Green Newton have already proven successful in stewardship and education. I would expand these efforts while also ensuring accountability within city operations – for example, by setting measurable targets for tree canopy growth, invasive species removal, and playground upgrades.

Finally, transparency is essential. Residents deserve to see how open space and climate dollars are being allocated and the progress we are making. Clear reporting would build public trust and support for future funding requests.

In short, the Garden City's open spaces are a cornerstone of our community and also one of our most powerful tools for climate resilience. Maintaining and improving them will require increased investment, smart use of outside funding, and stronger partnerships. I will continue to advocate for budgets and policies that reflect the urgency of this work.