

Newton Conservators

2025 Newton Candidate Questionnaire

Respondent: Becky Grossman

Office Sought: Ward 7 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:

I am most focused on Goals 1 and 2 of the Newton Open Space Plan. Managing, improving, and maintaining our open spaces is one of my top priorities. These spaces are a defining feature of Newton, yet the resources we dedicate to their care have not kept pace with the growing needs of our community.

I have consistently highlighted how inadequate our current funding allocations are for maintaining the open spaces we already have, let alone improving them. I have spoken up repeatedly for increased investment, and I clearly and unequivocally supported the recent override that included funding for this purpose. I will do so again if given the appropriate opportunity. Our open spaces are vital for health, recreation, and community well-being. Allowing them to deteriorate is a disservice to both today's residents and future generations.

I will continue to advocate for a sustainable funding approach, ensuring that we prioritize projects based on community benefit and environmental impact. This includes not only maintaining existing parks and conservation areas but also seeking opportunities to expand access to natural spaces. Our discussions should also include climate resilience planning, addressing issues like flooding and tree canopy loss. By integrating climate considerations into our open space strategy, we can make sure Newton's natural resources remain healthy and sustainable for decades to come.

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:

Given our limited financial resources, accelerating Newton's climate action will require creativity, strong leadership, and strategic decision-making. We must focus on solutions that both reduce greenhouse gas emissions and protect our natural resources from the impacts of extreme weather.

One area of opportunity is to rethink how we manage solid waste. The costs of waste disposal are rising rapidly, consuming funds that could otherwise support climate and open space initiatives. Recent efforts, such as expanding the Swap Shop, promoting composting, and encouraging residents to reduce consumption and waste, are beginning to take hold in our community. With continued outreach and education, these programs can grow significantly, reducing both our environmental footprint and our long-term costs.

In addition, I have advocated for a reevaluation of the city's approach to funding our pension liability. By more closely aligning the rate of growth in pension contributions with the growth of the overall city budget, we can free up resources for other top priorities, including accelerating action on our climate goals. This approach still fully honors our commitments to retirees while ensuring we have the flexibility to invest in urgent challenges like climate resilience.

Finally, I strongly supported the last override, which would have provided additional resources for climate and sustainability initiatives, and I will do so again if given the appropriate opportunity. Stable and predictable funding is critical to implementing the actions laid out in the Newton Climate Action Plan and Climate Vulnerability Assessment.

Moving forward, I will work to prioritize initiatives that deliver both environmental and financial benefits, such as energy efficiency upgrades, green infrastructure, and improved stormwater management. These steps will help us reduce emissions, protect our open spaces, and build resilience against the increasingly severe weather events we are experiencing.

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:

I do not believe current funding levels are sufficient to maintain high-quality open spaces or to address Newton's growing climate mitigation needs. Without changes, we risk falling further behind at a time when both the climate crisis and the needs of our community are accelerating.

As mentioned above, I have strongly advocated for a reevaluation of the city's approach to funding our pension liability. A few years ago, I worked closely with School Committee Chair Chris Brezski and several City Council colleagues to push for a more balanced funding strategy, which would more closely align the rate of growth in pension contributions with the growth of the overall city budget. While we were not able to achieve as large a reduction as we had hoped, we did make meaningful progress, and we continue to advocate for further adjustments. By taking this approach, we can free up critical resources for top priorities such as accelerating climate action, maintaining open spaces, and strengthening our infrastructure, while still fully meeting our commitments to retirees and responsibly managing long-term obligations.

In addition, I strongly supported the last override, which would have provided much-needed resources for climate and sustainability initiatives. I will do so again if given the appropriate opportunity. Stable, predictable funding is essential to carrying out the actions outlined in the Newton Climate Action Plan and Climate Vulnerability Assessment, as well as ensuring that our open spaces remain safe, accessible, and well-maintained for today's Newtonians and future generations.

Newton's residents deserve a city that not only plans for a sustainable future but also makes the tough financial decisions necessary to achieve it. I am committed to continuing this work and to advocating for funding strategies that match the scale of the challenges we face.