

# **Newton Conservators**

## **2025 Newton Candidate Questionnaire**

**Respondent:** Alison Leary

**Office Sought:** Ward 1 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 priorities include Objectives 2C, 2D and 2E as well as getting CR's in place for our open spaces. We made some progress on improving & expanding access to athletic fields and now it's time to focus on our long neglected passive open spaces. We are fortunate to have 316 acres of Conservation Commission land and 239 acres of Parkland. Yet, our parks and open spaces are often poor quality habitat and stressed ecosystems. Invasive species are rampant, negatively impacting native vegetation and wildlife. Improving the quality of natural areas is also an important tool in mitigating climate change and building resilience. Urban natural areas offer significant potential for capturing and managing stormwater. A report by The Natural Areas Conservancy, shows that improving the health of natural areas in urban or suburban areas through habitat restoration, invasive species control, and reforestation, can enhance the ability of these natural areas to absorb rainfall, reduce runoff, and provide critical flood control. There is an opportunity to optimize some of our larger parks like Cold Spring and Edmands Park to help mitigate flooding while improving the quality of the habitat. I will continue to advocate for the CR for Nahanton Park.

### **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:**

Both those plans have excellent recommendations. The city is good at planning but less effective with implementation. In 2018 the Climate Vulnerability Action Plan recommendations included, "Get rid of gas pipelines – plan for future transformation". Here we are in 2025 only starting on this. My priority is to implement and act! We must be more aggressive. The City of Newton, in collaboration with National Grid and Eversource, is finally working on implementing a residential Gas Free pilot to reduce GHG and support climate goals. This is a first step towards retiring our gas infrastructure. We have made significant progress with initiatives like BERDO and we are also part of the "Ten Communities" prohibiting fossil fuels in new buildings and major renovations, thereby enabling us to start the process of turning off the use of gas and start the process of retiring the gas infrastructure. I support the daylighting and the restoration of our natural habitats as part of stormwater or other infrastructure projects. We need to do more to reduce heat island impacts, reduce stormwater runoff and to protect the city from flooding.

**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:**

Funding has been abysmal for natural spaces and wildlife habitat. We must do better. We have an opportunity to improve the quality of our natural areas by hitching it to climate mitigation, stormwater improvements and flood control initiatives. However, these projects are expensive so we need to seek funding at the State and the (less likely) Federal level. I recently docketed a Resolution to support HB.1014/S.588 Establishment of a "Superfund" to aid communities to adequately fund climate adaptation and resilience projects. Very recently the Governor proposed a 25-year plan, "The Biodiversity Initiative" to protect and restore natural areas across Massachusetts that includes funding. I would support the creation of a City Climate Resiliency Trust Fund to fund climate mitigation projects. We have relied too heavily on volunteer help to manage our open spaces and while that is important we also need a well coordinated, consistent management of our open spaces within Parks and Recreation and the Conservation Commission.