

# **Newton Conservators**

## **2025 Newton Candidate Questionnaire**

**Respondent:** Julia A. Malakie

**Office Sought:** Ward 3 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:**

All six goals are important. Goal 1 Implementation relates to accomplishing Goal 2 Maintenance and Improvement. Goal 4 Minimize Gaps overlaps with Goal 6 Protection, although large privately owned open spaces are not necessarily where public gaps exist. Picking two, I would say Maintenance and Improvement, reflecting the predominant interest of residents, and Protection, because we can't connect or make accessible resources if they disappear. Priorities will largely be controlled by the next mayor. Much has been accomplished: park and trail improvements (excepting artificial turf field at Albemarle, an appalling dis-improvement), and additional forestry staff enabling more street tree planting and care of young trees. But I hope for better on Protection Objective 6B, communication with private owners of key parcels to consider protection/stewardship through CRs, easements or purchase. (Less interested in leases, which end.) It's dismaying that a Farwell Street parcel on the banks of the Charles River -- on a previous Open Space Plan wish list, became a 6-lot subdivision (still unfinished, with some houses needing stilts in the rear). The previous administration failed to acquire Webster Woods when it became available, leaving the current administration to rely on eminent domain. More recently, we missed out on the Mt. Alvernia property whose playing fields would have helped alleviate our shortage.

Under Maintenance and Improvement, I particularly want more city resources devoted to control of invasive species. The Conservators and volunteers are battling garlic mustard, black swallowwort, Japanese knotweed and more, but like Ukraine vs Russia, they need help. While monitoring the messy removal of artificial turf at NSHS, I was shocked by the forest of knotweed along the parking lot, that seems to just be accepted. I alert residents when I notice invasives in

their yards, and have participated in many invasive pulls over the years including Dolan Pond during NewtonServes. For several years I've pulled garlic mustard at Reverend Ford Playground with good results, and am starting on the more challenging black swallowwort. I hope to work with the next mayor to take Eversource up on their past offer to allow a path across their land from Auburn Street to this park. I want to see any unneeded portion of 70 Crescent St (still being used for Parks & Rec operations) added to the park, with access from Robinhood Street, which would be a win for connectivity and equity.

**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:**

Broadly speaking, I think the City Council should now focus more on resiliency and mitigating the harmful effects (both physical and financial) of climate change on Newton residents. It is a worthy goal to try to minimize Newton's carbon footprint, as we have done with Newton Power Choice, the electrification ordinance, and BERDO for large buildings, it sets a good example, and we can feel virtuous that we are doing our part, but we have to recognize that even if all of Newton were net-zero, it would have an infinitesimal impact on global climate change. We are experiencing effects of climate change now, notably more intense storms and heat waves. As ward councilor I've heard from many with flooding problems. I want to prioritize measures that protect local environment, save money for residents individually or as taxpayers, and/or protect residents' health.

Measures I support include:

- Further strengthening of the tree protection ordinance to cover all 1&2-family lots (as we tried to pass in the 2023 revision), and requiring tree impacts be considered earlier in the project approval, with a goal of low-impact development. Tree canopy has a direct effect on local temperatures, air quality and stormwater retention.
- Increasing setbacks and green space requirements in zoning.
- Strengthening our stormwater ordinance to require retention of 100-year storms onsite for new development, as Waltham and Watertown do (8.8" of rain in 24 hours vs 2" currently required in Newton).
- Curbside collection of organics as supported by the Solid Materials Management Commission.

- A plan for the Bullough's Pond dam that goes beyond the Office of Dam Safety requirement to prevent a breach in the event of overtopping in a 100-year storm. We need to minimize or eliminate the risk of overtopping and the flooding that would cause in Newtonville, with a systemwide approach that addresses stormwater retention both upstream and downstream.

I opposed the replacement of artificial turf fields at NSHS and NNHS, and the creation of a new one at Albemarle. I will oppose any further use of artificial turf on city property. We should prepare to go back to natural grass if (and I hope when) the Legislature bans expenditure of municipal funds on artificial turf.

**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:**

Current funding in these areas is not adequate, but that is also true in other budget areas, notably schools. It will be a challenge for the next mayor to balance needs, with some relief in sight around 2032 when the pension liability is fully funded. We cannot rely on operating overrides when many residents are feeling financial stress themselves, and until confidence in how the city spends money is restored. Federal funding is threatened.

As a city councilor, I can advocate for greater funding for these needs, but not put money into specific budget areas. In the interest of our city's fiscal health, I will be very reluctant to support conversion of commercial use property to residential when it is under City Council control. We will need to raise stormwater fees, which the current administration has begun to do.

I will support more robust efforts to attract businesses and make it easier for them to operate. I will also support cooperative efforts with community organizations, 'friends' groups and others who want to help, when that is possible. We also need to spread a wide net for members of city commissions to make use of the expertise of Newton residents.