

Newton Conservators

2025 Newton Candidate Questionnaire

Respondent: Garry Miller

Office Sought: Ward 5 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:

It's tough to choose from so many worthy goals, but as they say, if you have too many priorities, you have none at all. So, if forced to choose these would be my choices:

- 1) Care and continual renewal of the public tree canopy. Walking around the city this summer, I have experienced the positive impact that our mature street trees and a generous tree canopy can have on hot summer days.
- 2) Improve playing fields. Too many of our playing fields, tennis courts, and other facilities are in poor condition. As a tennis player, it pains me to report that many of our tennis courts are in need of significant repair, and below average maintenance is a common problem across our other public sports facilities as well.
- 3) Protect and improve natural spaces. We have a number of open spaces that remain unprotected, and those that are protected are overrun with invasive species. I would support a robust program to protect open space that is currently unprotected, remove invasive species from protected areas, and improve and connect wildlife corridors.

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 greatest sources of greenhouse gas emissions in Newton are our buildings, and the city has taken a number of steps to reduce emissions from these sources:

- 1) Creation of the Newton Power Choice program, which has enabled most Newton residents to get their electricity from renewable sources.
- 2) Adoption of the MA stretch energy code and electrification requirements for new construction.
- 3) Adoption of the Building Emissions Reduction and Disclosure Ordinance (BERDO), which requires emissions disclosure, a plan of action, and progress towards net-zero for our largest buildings (those greater than 20,000 sq feet).

Together, these actions will result in progress towards our climate goals. However, they are not enough for Newton to reach its goal of net-zero by 2050.

To meet these goals, and increase climate resiliency, I would advocate for these additional measures:

- 1) Extend BERDO to smaller buildings to at least include emissions reporting, to inform property owners of their carbon emissions and encourage them to eliminate emissions from their buildings.
- 2) Continue to build safer streets for all those who use them - cars, bikes, and pedestrians - to encourage alternate means of transportation.
- 3) Take every opportunity to expand electric vehicle charging infrastructure.
- 4) Establish a robust maintenance and renewal program of the tree canopy, which increases shade and helps prevent flooding.
- 5) Explore sharing geothermal power from municipal buildings like Countryside to surrounding neighborhoods.
- 6) Review and explore electric school buses as the technology around them improves.
- 7) Encourage more residents to opt in to curbside composting for food waste.
- 8) Work with utility companies to remove fossil fuel infrastructure from streets when it is no longer needed.

With a federal government hostile to efforts to reduce emissions, it has become ever more difficult for the city to meet its goals. However, with these measures and partnership with the state government, we can continue to make progress.

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 levels are clearly insufficient and have been for a long time. This has led to a lengthy list of deferred maintenance in our parks, degradation of our street tree canopy, and a failure to maintain native environments in our parks and conservation lands.

To reverse this trend, additional resources are required, and there are a number of options that can and should be explored to fund our parks at a level our residents need and deserve:

- 1) Grant funding from the state and private organizations. This would help with one-time projects, as such funding is unlikely to extend over multiple years.
- 2) User fees, especially for private clubs and parties. Generally, I dislike user fees due to the disparate impact they can have on our poorer residents. However, if they can be structured to provide tangible benefits to those who can pay them and offer viable options including waivers to those who cannot, they can help provide much needed dedicated revenue for the parks and open space.
- 3) Developer contributions specifically to the parks, and/or include open space as part of their development plans.
- 4) Include funding for parks as part of any future Proposition 2 1/2 override plan.
- 5) Build the city's tax base so there is more funding available for all our priorities, including parks, open space, and climate mitigation efforts.