



## 2024 Alexandria City Council Candidate Questionnaire

Please share any responses by Friday, May 31<sup>st</sup> to  
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CANDIDATE NAME: **James Lewis**

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1. In 2019, in response to the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Special Report on Climate, our city made a *Declaration of Climate Emergency*, and created its *2040 Environmental Action Plan* and *Green Building Policy* (GBP). A key goal of that EAP was to achieve a 50% reduction from 2005 levels of greenhouse gas pollution emitted by Alexandria by 2030. In the last election campaign, most if not all candidates identified climate change as among their top five priorities.
  - a. **Do you agree that Alexandria is in a climate emergency, and if so, where do you rank the climate emergency among your priorities?** **Yes! Climate change is an urgent emergency impacting our community (mostly through extreme weather and flooding) and all communities across the globe. When speaking with voters, accelerating our Energy and Climate Change Action Plan is part of my "elevator pitch" and sustainability is the first issue on my campaign website.**
  - b. **Are you committed to achieving the goal of 50% GHG reduction in our community-wide emissions by 2030, or do you see this as aspirational?** **Yes, I am committed to meeting this goal and accelerating our progress toward net carbon-zero.**
2. To its credit, the present Mayor and Council have established and begun funding a City Office of Climate Action.
  - a. **How will you evaluate our progress on achieving the greenhouse gas emissions reduction targets included in the City's Environmental Action Plan?** **I believe that we have made progress, but we need to accelerate efforts now to reach our goals. We have strong metrics in the Environmental Action Plan as well as the Energy and Climate Change Action Plan, those metrics should guide our evaluation of progress.**
  - b. **How will you hold the City Manager accountable for achieving the reductions necessary to meet these targets?** **Achieving our sustainability goals must be a top priority for Council and staff. Given that the Council-staff relationship runs through the City Manager, Council must make it clear to him/her/they that reducing emissions is a priority in all City activities. Additionally, I believe we should examine a regular reporting period, so Council and the public are updated on ongoing efforts.**
3. The Office of Climate Action is developing an update of our Green Building Policy to limit the increase in emissions from new buildings. Similarly, our neighbors in Arlington, Montgomery County, and the District of Columbia, among others in the region, have been strengthening their green building policies. Developers have raised concerns about this and are asking candidates to oppose or dilute this policy.
  - a. **How do you respond to the developers' threats that they will go to other jurisdictions if we upgrade energy efficiency requirements in new buildings**

approved under the DSUP process? My response: "I'm sorry we can't do business now, perhaps we can try again in the future?"

- b. Will you support a Green Building Policy that requires levels of energy efficiency in new buildings, such as reaching net-zero energy use, that are in line with our 2030 and 2050 emissions reduction goals? Yes! At present, Alexandria does not have a LEED requirement. The default standard comes from the state building code, which requires LEED silver. We buildings account for much of our emissions. Therefore, it is imperative that City Council use the special use permit/designated special use permit (SUP/DSUP) process to ensure new construction is as green as possible. We need onsite power generation, EV charging opportunities, stormwater management, a long-term tree canopy plan and strong code enforcement during construction. We need to be forward thinking and proactive to achieve our goal, including twisting developers' arms a bit more.

Net-zero energy multi-family buildings are being built today in Philadelphia and New York. As Alexandria revises our Green Building Plan and our goal must be 1) all electric, 2) significantly more energy efficient, similar to a passive house certification, and 3) more on-site renewable energy generation. Mayor Wilson has indicated every major development over the last 20 years has been supported by some kind of City tax incentive or infrastructure build-out, the City must now add incentives and stricter requirements to make new building envelopes the most efficient. Passive house standards for building envelopes would mean easier adaptive reuse and fewer complete teardowns/building replacement in the future.

- c. How should Alexandria estimate and plan for the multi-generational social costs to our community if developers continue to put up buildings that waste energy and burn methane? We need to prevent this type of wasteful and inefficient building. Given the personal and public health costs, especially for communities of color, generated by environmental injustices in housing, we cannot afford to estimate or plan for the costs because the costs – human lives – is too high.
4. Buildings are responsible for about 60% of our community's greenhouse gas pollution, and existing buildings are responsible for about 95% of those emissions. Sharply reducing energy use in existing buildings is critical for reaching our 2030 climate goals, will save residents and businesses money over the long-term, and make buildings more comfortable and healthy. As Virginia is a Dillon Rule state and cannot mandate energy reductions of private property, the City is currently limited to incentives such as financial subsidies, tax relief, public recognition, technical assistance, revamping the City's PACE program, and taking advantage of existing federal, state and utility weatherization programs. The City can also expand the reach of Alexandria's Green Building Policy to include all renovated buildings that are subject to City land use approval.
- a. What level of priority should be given to reducing building energy use and methane emissions in existing buildings, and how would you propose financing and supporting such efforts? Given the level of emissions generated, energy efficiency, on-site generation, tree canopy and electrification all need to be priorities for existing buildings. We need an all-of-the-above approach, including extensive public recognition, reducing bureaucracy and potential incentives, to drive private landowners and shared equity communities (condos, etc.) to reduce carbon emissions.

- b. Which of the abovementioned ideas would you support, and what other ideas can you offer for reducing the energy use of our existing buildings by 50% by 2030? I strongly support the use of public recognition for buildings and communities actively greening themselves and our community. We also need to provide technical assistance and reduce bureaucratic bottlenecks and hurdles when existing communities look to go green, especially with on-site solar. Finally, we must also leverage Alexandria Housing and Redevelopment Authority (AHRA) and Regional Industrial Development Authority (RIDA) granting and bonding opportunities to support energy efficiency programs and/or on-site green power generation in existing commercial and multi-family as well as affordable housing buildings.**
  
- 5. Climate change is steadily increasing flooding and extreme precipitation risks. Alexandria has already made substantial investments in flood control, both in our stormwater infrastructure and along the Old Town waterfront. At the same time, some Alexandria neighborhoods are considerably hotter than others, due to historic redlining, the urban heat island effect, and a lack of tree coverage and green space.
  - a. How should projected changes in flooding and extreme weather events over the coming years be accounted for in our City's infrastructure investments? With once every hundred-year storms occurring every five years, we need to build and maintain our infrastructure for that volume of water. Rain is coming; we must manage it.**
  
  - b. Will you support providing funding to increase planting and maintenance of trees with a priority in our hottest neighborhoods, adequately connecting residents to cooling centers if they cannot afford air conditioning, and other needed actions? Yes. I also support the expansion of public-private partnerships to remain, protect, expand and preserve our mature tree canopy, including street trees.**
  
- 6. Use of public transportation, bicycling and walking should become default modes of transportation in order to increase the safety and livability of our communities, provide mobility for those who cannot drive, and reduce energy use and air pollution.
  - a. Do you support continuing free DASH service, and investments in bus rapid transit (BRT) routes and bus stop infrastructure? Yes! As a member of the Traffic and Parking Board and Transportation Commissioner, I have long supported expanded DASH and BRT service as well as an increased number of bus stops, especially ADA accessible stops.**
  
  - b. Do support establishing protected bike lanes along key routes to connect all Alexandrians? Yes! As a member of the Traffic and Parking Board and Transportation Commissioner, I have voted for nearly all of bike lane projects advanced within the last decade, including along key routes in Alexandria. I have also supported investments in our trail network as well as maintenance of existing bike-ped facilities.**