



2024 Alexandria City Council Candidate Questionnaire

Please share any responses by Friday, May 31st to
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CANDIDATE NAME: **Sarah Bagley**

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. I've made clear in my communications with city staff and our community and in my own daily choices and behaviors that all of our policies; housing, transit, open spaces, must be informed by that emergency. This issue doesn't so much "rank" amongst my priorities (housing, safer and more sustainable transit, gun violence prevention) it informs my approach to these and all issues.

- 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?**

This is a goal that we must pursue with seriousness and purpose. Creating our Office of Climate Action was an important step towards this as it strengthens and solidifies our work across the City and regionally. I will continue to emphasize the need for sustainable public transportation and will increase the conversation around existing buildings and electrifying and adding solar to existing homes and businesses.

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?**

We need to evaluate progress not simply at the rate at which we are reducing emissions but the rate at which we are applying, competing for, and winning state and federal grants and public/private partnerships funds to accelerate that work. We need to work backwards from our 2030 and 2050 benchmarks to establish where we need to be or what infrastructures and funding sources need to be in place well prior to those dates to enable the type of projects and retrofits that will be necessary to achieve those goals. If we are not accelerating the rate at which we are updating older buildings and reducing transportation related emissions, we will not reach our goals. I will continue to uplift these issues in our Council priority sessions, Housing Master Plan discussions, transportation and mobility goals and planning and open and green space planning. If each of these areas does not touch on this issue, we will not be positioned to reach our goals.

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?**

Weatherization programs, many of which already provide funding, are a great opportunity to improve not just energy efficiency but quality of life for residents of older homes and buildings. We should invest not only in expanding in these programs but in door-to-door engagement to inform people about them and their benefits. The Solarize Virginia program is another program requiring more public engagement for what can be a very useful and impactful change for homes that can benefit from solar installation. We should push again for passage of the Local Environmental Impact Fund which was passed by the House and Senate this year but vetoed by the Governor, that would have allowed for Alexandria to create incentive programs for people to switch out their electric appliances and HVAC units as well sustainable landscaping and micromobility devices. For many the upfront investments costs and educational barriers present challenges but if we can educate and defray those costs, we can make a direct impact. New buildings are already vastly improved from an emissions perspective over older buildings so this next Council must prioritize the conversation, funding, and community engagement to tackle the existing structures with the highest emissions and lowest energy efficiency.

- 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?**

It will take an "all of the above" approach to reach our 2030 and 2050 goals and I would not foreclose consideration of any of these ideas and also an RPACE style program to allow for incentives in residential developments and not only commercial settings (which are being built at a much slower rate than residential currently).

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?**

The City has made a substantial investment in flooding related infrastructure that will take place over the next ten years. We must continue to work closely with and respond to not only FEMA flooding maps but our own development plans and natural migration patterns of our residents towards certain portions of the City. We should continue to create bioswale retention areas as a matter of course in our new street and sidewalk designs, and along with street trees, we should require and emphasize permeable pavers and other porous substances. We should revisit the use of synthetic

turf and other substances for our fields and play areas to ensure we are not creating more heat and putting more plastic into the environment.

- 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. We must apply an equity lens to our climate action work and recognize that not all levels of shade are currently available nor are there adequate access to green spaces and water features. Our design must emphasize increased access to those resources in the West End specifically and our funding and design discussions, particularly in the Alexandria West plan, Landmark and other large scale redevelopments, set aside enough land for cooling and shade along with housing and public amenities.

- 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. I have and will continue to advocate for increased frequency in service and BRT style options that improve reliability and investments in bus stops and seating to make service more equitable and safer for all.

- b. Do support establishing protected bike lanes along key routes to connect all Alexandrians?**

Yes, as both a daily user of our bike infrastructure, and witness to areas with lacking infrastructure, I support protected bike lanes that fully connect people to the places they need to go for not just work but for social activities and errands. Quality bike infrastructure allows for the daily replacement of hundreds of vehicles miles traveled within our city by gas or electric vehicles and bikes (including e-bikes) have some of the lowest emission of any form of transportation.