

Responses of Gary Aiken, Mason District, thegpac.com April 25, 2019

Watershed Questions to Fairfax County Supervisor Candidates – 2019

1. Resource Protection Areas and floodplains delineated along our streams and rivers are designed to limit erosion and protect our citizens from flooding. Yet these undeveloped protected zones offer a tempting target for developers hungry for low-cost alternatives to redeveloping in built-up locations. What can Fairfax County do to maintain protections along our waterways intact?

As Fairfax County has become increasingly dense, we are encroaching upon floodplains. I've seen what this has done in parts of Mason District and in neighboring Providence. We have enough areas of underdeveloped infill in Mason District that I will be extremely skeptical of any new plans that encroach on floodplains. We need to protect our waterways – especially in the older communities of Mason District where streams and woodlands provide so much beauty. Our density is underutilized. We should properly utilize our existing density, rather than increase density where it doesn't belong.

2. Conservation corridors permit genetic flow of flora and fauna species between habitat areas, helping to prevent localized extinctions. What can Fairfax County do to preserve and enhance conservation corridors on county property, in county projects, and on private property?

I'm not educated on this subject and I do not have a good answer here. In my experience, I would ask additional questions on this topic and entertain any information you have about the subject.

3. Fairfax County recently adopted the Fairfax Green Initiatives to address climate change. Yet every day, trees, Nature's simplest carbon sequestration device, are sacrificed in favor of asphalt which increases heat island effect. This is often done in the name of other environmental goals, such as bicycle paths or stormwater ponds. What can Fairfax County do to reverse the trend of tree cover loss?

I think there is too much emphasis on Fairfax County somehow preventing catastrophic anthropogenic climate change and not enough emphasis on just doing simple things in our neck of the woods that improve the lives of citizens in Mason District and Fairfax County. We don't have to have a macro argument to make a micro change. In many areas of Mason District we have eliminated trees or are thinking about doing more of that in favor of widening residential streets or having new sidewalks. As Supervisor, I would be skeptical of new plans for sidewalks along residential streets that change the character of the neighborhood. I will support new development in underutilized density in opportunity zones that encourages additional small private parks and amenities with indigenous plants and trees.

4. In 2012 Fairfax County successfully sued the EPA to prevent implementation of a proposed TMDL (Total Maximum Daily Load) plan to reduce sediment and erosion in Accotink Creek. A revised TMDL plan for Accotink Creek was approved in 2017. How can Fairfax County avoid further delay and move forward with meaningful actions to return Accotink Creek and similar impaired streams to health?

Crook Branch Stream Restoration project has taken far too long to be taken care of. The study was completed in 2017, yet the project won't start until late 2019 or 2020. Our inattention to basic maintenance of streams leads to larger problems in our lakes. My position is that we must fully fund basic maintenance in Fairfax County (not defer it) and we must consider the maintenance costs of any new projects when we consider funding them. Too often Fairfax County makes investments without looking at the total cost and long tail liabilities of action or inaction.

5. Fairfax County is pursuing a program of stream restoration projects to reduce stream erosion. Yet the cause of the erosion lies not in the streams, but in upland built-up areas. How can Fairfax County directly address the excessive runoff from paved surfaces that is the prime cause of stream erosion?

In Mason District, I will oppose new development in residential neighborhoods or up-zoning for density in residential neighborhoods so long as there is underutilized density in existing Opportunity Zones.

6. The future of Lake Accotink is being decided now. Sediment buildup from excessive erosion is accumulating in Lake Accotink at a rate that will require either costly dredging projects every 15 years or the removal of the dam, allowing the sediment to pass downstream. What is your position on the future of Lake Accotink?

We should preserve Lake Accotink. The Park area is utilized by so many groups and communities in Fairfax County. Further, boating, canoeing and other recreational activities on the lake are important for youth activities and the general population. We should establish a reserve account for environmental remediation like many HOA's in this county already do for their ponds, streams, or flood areas. This reserving would be a current expense in the budget so that Board members and county citizens can see the costs of ongoing maintenance and future maintenance.

7. Streams in Fairfax County are plagued by accumulations of immortal plastic trash that originates on paved surfaces and flows down storm drains. Can Fairfax County lead by example by eliminating single-use plastics at county facilities and functions? What other solutions do you envision?

I think a ban on all single use plastics is unreasonable. For example, many individuals with disability cannot use paper straws and require plastic. I'm not a "One Fairfax" supporter, but one could argue that eliminating plastic straws incongruent with One Fairfax. That said, Mason District is plagued by trash and debris that makes its way into our waterways and into the Bay. I am in favor, locally, of a "Clean Up Bailey's" Force. A group of county employees (or contractors) in uniform whose job it is to pick up trash and keep our Opportunity Zones clean. This will show that Fairfax County cares about trash on paved surfaces and abandoned yards and that will have positive externalities for citizens and businesses.

8. Fairfax County is collaborating with Virginia Department of Environmental Quality in developing a Northern Virginia road salt management strategy to reduce salt contamination of aquifers, streams, and drinking water. What steps can Fairfax County take to address this issue?

I'm not educated on this subject and I do not have a good answer here. In my experience, I would ask additional questions on this topic and entertain any information you have about the subject.

9. When is the best time to plant a tree? A – Now B – 20 years ago

I didn't live in Fairfax County 20 years ago. Now is probably the best time. I'd ask an arborist though – I don't have much of a green thumb!

◆ Think about your watershed as a candidate asking voters to put our future into your hands. ◆

Friends of Accotink Creek

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