

## Responses of Larysa Kautz, Lee District [larysakautz.com](http://larysakautz.com) May 18, 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?

**RPAs were established in 1993 as an element of the Chesapeake Bay Preservation Ordinance. The dataset currently used by Fairfax County was established at that time, and updated in 2003 to include physically mapped perennial streams. That means that the basis for the evaluation for developers' requests is data that is between 16 and 26 years old.**

**I believe the County needs to begin work to update its dataset - while boundaries "may be further refined by detailed field studies conducted at the time a plan is submitted", this best practice is obviously limited by project scope, time, and staff availability. It is crucially important to have up-to-date information as a basis for the evaluation of a project's feasibility.**

**Second, I believe the County should go above and beyond these outdated standards, at least by expanding our designations to include some non-perennial streams. I personally believe the minimum buffer should also be expanded beyond the current 100 feet. That way, when developers endeavor to build a case for encroaching on existing RPAs and Environmental Quality Corridors (EQCs) due to "extraordinary circumstances", the baseline of protection for these sensitive and extremely important areas will have a more realistic starting point for negotiation, given our climate reality.**

**This is a critically important topic. As the effects of climate change continue to materialize, the quality of our stormwater systems and the health of our waterways will be tested in ways that they have not been before. It is entirely possible that the 100' buffers will be strained in their effectiveness as extreme weather events become more common. It is exceedingly important that the BOS exceeds minimum standards related to RPAs whenever feasible as part of the larger efforts to boost our climate resiliency.**

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?

**The most important thing that Fairfax County can do on this topic, is to continue to engage and coordinate with the various other jurisdictions and land-owning authorities in the region. The Northern Virginia Regional Commission identified many natural areas that are of regional significance for our shared health and common wealth - working together to preserve and protect them is in the best interest for the entire area. Shared plans and responsibility will ensure success.**

**We need to engage with and educate more of our private landowners about the value and benefits of conservation corridors. We also need to establish more public-private partnerships to fund and enhance conservation corridors. A conservation corridor project that I'm aware of in another state, for example, was able to install roadside habitat, restore riparian habitat and revegetate canal banks by relying on multiple cost share programs to fund the projects, including USDA ACP funds, the U.S. Fish**

**and Wildlife Service's Partners for Wildlife program, and EPA 319 funds through the local resource conservation district. If we think creatively and braid and blend funding, we can accomplish so much more.**

**I've spent a majority of my career at Melwood working to bring different jurisdictions and different groups to the table and to find innovative sources of funding to serve over 2500 people with disabilities every year. We work in DC, Maryland, and Virginia, which means dealing with different laws, different expectations, and different needs. I pride myself on being able to find solutions to problems and I would take the same approach as Supervisor.**

**Also, Fairfax County should enforce and strengthen their protective ordinances, special area designations, and planning guidance to establish a higher and more realistic standard for the negotiations that are sure to follow, on County property, in County projects, and on private property.**

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?

**We should do a comprehensive analysis of ALL County land, including all of the land around County buildings (i.e., office space, schools, rec centers), to see where we can preserve, shore up, and create more green space. There is lot of wasted space around County facilities that should be populated with trees. This would be a great first step towards reversing the trend of tree cover loss -- one that we can do quickly.**

**Standards for developments and developers should be kept as high as possible, so that natural habitats and tree cover are preserved. It is generally impossible to "go back" and fix things once irresponsible development has taken place. Care must be taken as development projects are presented to the Board, with acute attention to detail on how native habitats can be avoided or otherwise taken into consideration.**

**I am hopeful that the new Environmental and Energy Coordination office, as proposed in the Fairfax Green Initiatives, will provide the structure necessary to do just that, since their work will be Countywide and report directly to the County Executive.**

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?

**Although it has taken a long time, the research, fieldwork, court cases, and public discourse relating to our beloved Accotink Creek and Lake seem to finally be bringing about true change for the better, which will have state and perhaps national implications on environmental standards relating to stormwater and road salting procedures.**

**That said, the situation continues to be dire given the ever-increasingly-strong storm events we face, and requires us to speed up our decision-making and conservation efforts. Our County employees are working in concert with scientists and other professionals to discover a long-lasting and feasible solution that hopefully can be applied more easily (and more quickly!) to future cases.**

**Our explosion in development has increased the amount of runoff that enters the Accotink Creek watershed. This leads to more erosion of the stream banks, adding to the amount of sediment in the water. We must ensure that future development does not exacerbate the problem.**

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?

**There are many good ideas in our toolkit with respect to stormwater management -- on municipal, commercial, and residential fronts. The issue is that a good many of them are focused on new development or retrofitting as necessary. More incentives need to be put in place to help make it feasible for homeowners and existing commercial property owners to get involved in a meaningful way.**

**Stormwater is a critical issue in this County. There are many traditional options available to us, from retention ponds and permeable paving when appropriate, to stream restorations. In older neighborhoods, stream restorations are a good option to help alleviate the negative effects of rushing water as well as help slow it down as it moves through the watershed. Additional options, such as preservation of RPAs and greenway buffers, will come into play more and more as the County continues to develop. This is another area where it is imperative that developers are held to the high standards and best practices.**

**Additionally, Fairfax is largely non-agricultural, but the County itself is the largest single user of pesticide, insecticide, and asphalt-related products and application chemicals. It is astounding that the volume of use and the effects of release seem not to have recently been studied by the County. The County must do so, rapidly, with a view to using the lowest quantity of the lowest-toxicity chemicals available.**

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?

**This is an incredibly important issue because Lake Accotink is a treasured resource that provides invaluable services for our residents. We must look at this issue from a cost-benefit perspective, considering the impact of each solution on residents and the surrounding environment. The solution must be a sustainable one, taking into account not just environmental impact, but financial and community impact as well.**

**Sediment build up has always been an issue for Lake Accotink, which is evident in the fact that there have been dredging operations to reduce the amount of sediment since the 1980s. It seems that dredging up to this point has been merely an expensive, labor intensive, and temporary solution that doesn't result in long-term sustainable lake improvements. Because of this, it is my opinion that dredging must be in conjunction with another method of action, such as creating a sediment forebay that would catch sediment before it actually enters the lake, therefore preventing buildup. This could prevent the high costs that are required when reactionary efforts have to be made when sediment builds up too high. However, it is critical that the community is engaged on this issue and that the costs are considered before action is taken.**

**Lake Accotink is unique because it is located in the middle of a community. While removing the dam would undoubtedly solve the issue of sediment build up, it is of the utmost importance that extensive**

studies are done to assess the impact that this could have on both residents, the surrounding area, and the current wildlife that depends on the Lake for an ecosystem. It is critical to engage the community on this issue.

**We should explore public-private partnerships that could bring sustainable funding for Lake Accotink - from conservation foundations, to environmental nonprofits, to universities.**

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?

**Fairfax County must play an important role in reducing single-use plastics. It's been clearly established by scientists that plastics biodegrade slowly, if at all, and pose serious threats to wildlife through entanglement and consumption, through the absorption of toxic chemicals in our water, and by plastic odors that mimic some species' natural food. To reduce this negative impacts, we need to incentivize and facilitate recycling with bottle deposit and bag tax ordinances. We also need to build the necessary institutions and systems, and fully fund initiatives to address problems with the recycling process, which is still far too burdensome and lacks the proper incentives to make it work well. We should also focus beyond the consumers on increased producer responsibility for reuse and recycling and incentivize our local businesses to use only sustainable packaging materials. We should actively support business that are incorporating "cradle-to-cradle" (i.e., circular economic) design into their products. We should also encourage adopt "opt-in" policies on single-use items like plastic straws (i.e., those items would not be available or only upon request). It's a small change but studies have shown that, by making wastefulness an active choice rather than the status quo, we can have a large impact on consumer behavior.**

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?

**An important step to take when looking at road salt management is looking at different cases that have been employed in surrounding communities to see to what extent they have been successful. Road salt management is tricky, because different methods depend on a number of factors, such as available equipment. Further, certain methods may work better in different areas depending on environmental factors. Therefore, collaborating and conversing with the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality is a critical, because this agency provides us with necessary expertise that will help us reach a creative solution to reduce saltwater contamination in the area in a way that is sustainable and cost effective.**

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

**According to an old proverb, the answer is B then A: "The best time to plant a tree was twenty years ago, the second best time is now."**

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

## Friends of Accotink Creek

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