



Arlington Tree Action Group (ATAG)

Questions for County Board Candidates
June 2020

1. Preserving Arlington's dwindling natural resources, especially trees: Will this be a priority and how will you do it? What first steps would you take?

Absolutely, natural resource protection and tree canopy are a priority for me. Arlington's tree canopy yields nearly \$7 million in environmental savings annually, improving quality of life, reducing air temperatures and removing pollutants, and reducing asthma, bronchitis, myocardial infarction, upper respiratory symptoms and heat-related stress from climate change. Trees are also a key component of natural stormwater management and watershed protection, a pressing and escalating need in Arlington. We must do all we can to protect and regrow Arlington's tree canopy.

First, we must hold staff and contractors accountable on both County and Schools sites. The County must enforce permit requirements, not give itself and APS free passes for permit requirement violations. When APS cut more trees than permitted on the Ashlawn Elementary School site, the County Board changed the permit terms instead of imposing penalties. Projects at just nine publicly owned sites accounted for the loss of 979 trees between 2014 and 2018. Too often the replacement trees are not cared for and die off quickly without replacement. We need to do better.

Second, we should incentivize tree preservation and maintenance, both public and private, including collaborating with APS, Northern Virginia Parks, Dominion Power and exploring a public-private partnership or conservation trust or non-profit to help maintain our canopy. We should include after-action analysis for each project to confirm final tree condition and remediate if needed. Also we should consider enacting a tree ordinance to conserve trees during development based on Arlington's status as an EPA-designated ozone nonattainment area.

Third, we should value trees economically in cost-benefit analyses. Consider a use-value assessment program to reward property owners for keeping tracts of land forested, open and undeveloped, as in Alexandria, Fairfax, Loudoun County. In particular, we should prioritize reforestation of land that can support stormwater and flood resilience. Currently Arlington's tree cover is ~40 percent, our understory trees and streamside trees are severely impacted by deer overpopulation and erosion, and our impermeable surface has been increasing at ~ 9 acres per year.

Fourth, we must plan comprehensively. Protecting Arlington's tree canopy must be part of a comprehensive watershed plan that includes redesigning open space and a comprehensive cutting-edge stormwater system; a stormwater utility or fee structure would help incent good behavior by property owners (including government!) Specifically, we need to include trees in cost-benefit analysis for new development or reuse. But context matters. In some cases, sidewalks on one side of a street are fine, if safety needs are met and mature trees are preserved. Likewise, consider tree condition and viability.

Casey Trees in Washington, DC is a great example of setting goals and meeting them across sectors. I was an early volunteer with them, working in small teams of neighbors and students to build a tree location and condition inventory (using cutting-edge Palm Pilots!). From 1973 to 1999 there had been a 64% decline in Washington DC's tree canopy. I am proud that DC has now restored 38% of its tree canopy, with a goal of 40% by 2032. In Arlington we have not lost as much, but we can use the same tools to restore and do better.

2. Requiring comprehensive environmental assessments before design of County projects: How can the County explicitly calculate the value of our "natural capital" into projects? Will you do this and if so, how would the assessments be used in the design phase?

Too often our County (and Schools) projects follow a linear design path that fails to consider both existing "natural capital" and the opportunity to create more during pre-design. This often leaves natural resource considerations until late in the design, as challenges to overcome, rather than the opportunities they present. As a result we fail to consider natural resources in our site selection and project goals, then add time and expense to projects, while often failing to deliver on our natural resource goals.

Every capital project we undertake, whether new construction or maintenance, is an opportunity to improve our "natural capital" .We can do better, by ensuring upfront data, an economic value of "natural capital" at the start of each project, and audits of implementation and maintenance after construction. As outlined in Question 1 above, I favor: i) a comprehensive tree inventory and condition monitoring, (ii) calculation and accountability of "natural capital" on County and APS projects, (iii) incentives to private owners, (iv) calculating economic value of trees in cost-benefit analyses, and (v) ensuring we include trees in comprehensive planning.

Finally, to really improve our performance and ensure the improvements stick, I support a Natural Resources Office that oversees Arlington's trees and open space to holistic consideration and assessment that reports to the County Manager. This Natural Resources Office should not reside within the current Department of Environmental Services, which is largely geared towards transportation infrastructure and public works.

3. Incorporating the preservation of natural resources into all of the County's daily functions like streets, sewers, traffic, etc.: Will you do this? And how?

Yes, I will **bring a critical eye and independent voice**, ready to ask hard questions, break down silos between departments, and hold staff accountable for results.. I know that context is critical and one-size-fits-all often does not work. In my professional career and in Arlington civic leadership, I am known for bringing people together to resolve tough challenges and follow through to get plans implemented well -- as Chair of the Hamm Middle School building committee, and Stratford National Historic Site historic interpretation committee, and as a founding member of both the Lee Highway Alliance and JFAC (Joint Facilities Advisory Committee).

First, I will bring **bold leadership to address climate change and flood resilience, through design and fiscal solutions**. Today stormwater upgrades in Arlington are designed to meet “10-year” flood standards, not the now-regular “100-year” event. With nearly 40% of Arlington’s streams now underground and non-permeable surface continuing to expand, we need to do better, and fast. Every investment decision (e.g., County/Schools capital plans, site plan reviews) *must* include a cost-benefit analysis, including stormwater, school capacity, and transportation impacts.

Arlington is experiencing a sustained development boom and accelerating flood risk, but is far behind on requiring that development to mitigate the consequences of climate change. This is not necessarily a fun or sexy problem to solve, but it is an issue we have to tackle head-on. We need to bring together cutting-edge technology, zoning, and appropriate incentives so the urban growth that sustains our local economy contributes to our climate change resilience. Strong LEED goals and requirements, energy efficiency incentives, the introduction of a stormwater utility, requiring open space as part of development plans, onsite waste management, and large-scale greywater and blackwater installations are a few of the strategies that Arlington needs to explore and employ urgently to protect our community.

Second, I will advocate for equity in natural resources. These are all not just questions of safety and livability, tackling these knotty infrastructure and planning problems also address questions of equity. As the recent flooding in Michigan has shown, those most affected by natural disasters are usually those whose economic status makes them the least resilient. This holds true in Arlington as it does elsewhere.

Third, I will bring stakeholders together with data and incentives, to drive change.

We need a comprehensive County-wide watershed plan. With the right incentives, parks, schools, rights of way and privately-held land, can help reduce and manage stormwater to benefit all Arlingtonians. Solutions should include constructed wetlands, greywater reuse, reforestation and tree canopy, permeable surfaces, creative shared use, and biophilic design principles. As a County Board member, I will convene leading experts and develop a stormwater utility or fee to ensure all users (including the federal government) pay for the stormwater capacity they use and benefit directly from managing their own or others’ stormwater.

Finally, I will bring practical experience to ensure good implementation. I am trained as an engineer and have real, practical experience in development, planning and sustainability. As a Fulbright Scholar in Africa, I taught about renewable energy at a university. I led campus planning and development for SEED boarding school, developed public-private facility partnerships at EdBuild, led sustainable design and planning for retail, hospitality, residential, office, education, public facilities, aviation, and regional energy projects worldwide at Gensler

Global Energy. I have seen again and again that we must pair innovative design with careful implementation, after-actions, and continuous improvement. Too often in Arlington, especially on schools and parks projects, we scramble to fix troublespots, rather than preventing them with robust implementation and maintenance. For example, renovations at Stratford Park added a new rain garden/retention structure, but failed to get the water there from a natural spring, so more concrete was poured and mature trees cut down. New trees were not watered and died. Baseball practice happened, with a shopvac. We have to do better.

4. What steps can be taken to break down silos in County offices whose projects directly impact the environment?

First, as a Board member I will **prioritize accountability, open data, and transparency**, ensuring proactive coordination across County offices and with our community. Today our County Board follows staff agendas and rubber stamps plans, rather than leading boldly and asking good questions. So far this year, every motion by the Board has been accepted unanimously. The County Manager and team need to be held accountable with a robust planning process up front, check-in's throughout, and follow-up with after actions, lessons learned, and audits after every project. Bringing people together to work with data, see root causes and build a shared plan of action goes a long way to breaking down silos.

Second, **Schools and County staff and boards must work-in-hand**, to make sure we are on a sustainable path on spending and return on investment for natural capital. We know that our schools are our biggest single cost, for both operating and capital dollars. Specific tools include multi-year budgets, a County-wide public facilities plan, shared community amenities and scheduling, and a robust, transparent independent audit function. Schools and their local communities must be linked and integral to everyone--especially outside school hours. In a county with such limited land resources, why can't we plan better and consider our schools and their amenities, whether sports, arts, or meeting spaces, to be more community oriented. The County Board and School Board must work together and hold staff accountable for better planning and better execution, and demand better value for all Arlingtonians; and they must start immediately. Strong management and accountability will yield a brighter outlook for our school system and a better relationship between our schools and our community. This collaboration will bring more staff and offices together to continue the work of breaking down silos. We just can't wait to get this right.

Third, I believe we should consider a **Natural Resources Office** to lead holistic watershed planning, integrating proactive trees, wildlife, water quality and open space considerations across both public and private development projects. This office should report to the County Manager, not reside within the Department of Environmental Services, which is largely transportation and public works.

5. Ideal population growth for Arlington: The County's population is currently 236,000 and growing fast. What, in your mind, is the ideal population for Arlington and how will you ensure adequate infrastructure and services, along with environmental sustainability needed to sustain every resident?

Years ago, Arlington was seen as a cutting-edge leader in smart growth and innovation. While the vision was strong, too often we assumed all growth was good and that everything would just work out. The County Board has rubber-stamped additional density that has accelerated growth, often without thorough cost-benefit analysis that includes indirect costs such as infrastructure, schools, transportation, health, and environment. This has not been done either proactively or retrospectively. In order to ensure we get good value and to carefully manage growth to build a thriving and livable Arlington we need to marry both bold vision and practical implementation.

Arlington must stop rubber stamping additional density that strains our already stretched infrastructure, schools, transportation, health, and environment. We can't stop growing, but we can be much smarter about it. The County Board must ensure that any future growth is both practical and proactive. Developers should no longer be given free reign to add residential or office density without significantly contributing to the community resources that their buildings will strain. I support measured growth, at a lesser pace than we have seen and with a much more robust planning process to ensure we don't grow for the sake of growth and fully cost, plan for and implement infrastructure, school capacity and services needs. My goal will be measured growth balanced with livability. One of my favorite things about Arlington is that such a small geographic area has managed to cultivate and develop neighborhoods with unique characteristics and distinguishing attributes, but connected together to be one Arlington.