

## 2021 Candidate Sustainability Questionnaire

### 1. General Sustainability:

A. What do sustainability and climate resiliency mean to you in the context of local governance?

As the “city in the country,” we have some of the key elements for creating a sustainable, climate resilient future. We are fortunate to have a walkable downtown core and a vibrant small business sector, surrounded by rural areas. At the local level, we can adopt and enforce a strong Unified Development Ordinance that will implement our city’s 2015 Comprehensive Plan, which embodies the city-in-the-country concept. By concentrating commercial and residential development in our urban core, we can limit the environmental impacts of development and transportation in our city’s Greenbelt and avoid the substantial costs of building and maintaining roads, along with the extensive system of water, sewer, gas, and electric lines that would be needed. We can promote the expansion of our urban forest. Street trees reduce air pollution, shade buildings to reduce summer energy use, increase property values and economic activity for downtown businesses. Street trees and other elements of green infrastructure reduce stormwater runoff into streams and lakes, thereby reducing water pollution and the costs of maintaining storm sewer systems. We can facilitate the development of affordable housing so that more people who work in our city will not have to commute long distances from adjacent communities. We can support initiatives like Complete Streets that create a more walkable, bikeable city that will make us more attractive to visitors and future residents and reduce the impacts of automobile use. Beyond programs, local governance creates a structure for the economy, the environment and the social workings of a community. I believe environmental sustainability can function as a tool that promotes a strong local economy, preserves the unique character of our city, and improves quality of life for all residents.

B. What are your top 3 sustainability-related priorities for Saratoga Springs, and what concrete actions will you take to address them?

My first priority is the city budget. As finance commissioner, I will rebuild our city finances after COVID, maintain and improve our bond rating and focus on finding cost efficiencies in our city budget. Rebuilding our finances, and having a good bond rating allows us to undertake projects as opportunities for funding arise, and provides a strong safety net should we face another crisis. Strong finances allow us to address problems before they become emergencies. I will initiate the creation of a Climate

Action and Resiliency Plan to identify opportunities, establish long term programs and formulate implementation timelines that can prepare us for environmental issues impacting our city now and in the future. Furthermore, I will work with community leaders to ensure that the UDO protects our greenbelt. Our city benefits from being a “city in the country.”

## **2. Climate Crisis:**

A. What role do you think local government should play in preparing for and addressing climate change?

Local government plays an important role in the climate crisis. When municipalities adopt planning and zoning guidelines with climate change in mind, they can reap environmental and economic benefits. Zoning that keeps housing and workplaces closer together, combined with good public transportation, bikeable streets, and electric vehicle charging stations can reduce emissions and improve quality of life. Protecting open space, like our greenbelt, leaves habitats and ecosystems intact, which in turn improves their ability to withstand and adapt to climate change.

B. What policies and programs will you implement to improve the environmental health and climate resiliency of our community in the face of increasing climate disruption, including extreme temperatures and precipitation events?

Records show that average annual precipitation throughout the Northeast, including our area, has been steadily increasing for decades. We are experiencing more and more heavy precipitation events. Temperatures also are steadily increasing. Climate scientists warn that these trends are likely to continue.

Under these circumstances it is important to develop and maintain a strong finance department with fund balances and a strong bond rating to ensure we can work towards climate resilience. I will work with all members of the City Council to develop and implement policies and programs needed to address the impacts of our changing climate. I will seek public input as we go along and use the City website and social media to educate and inform the public. Policy and program development will include the following considerations:

- Long-term budgetary planning to ensure that funding will be available for climate-related projects.
- Budgeting for the purchase of materials and equipment needed to respond to emergencies resulting from extreme storm events.
- Expanding funding reserves to prepare for emergencies.

- Assessing vulnerable infrastructure, such as roads, culverts, bridges, and storm sewers, to schedule needed upgrades.
- Reducing greenhouse gas emissions.
- Protecting wetlands, streams, lakes, and natural habitats through the development and enforcement of a strong UDO.
- Using green infrastructure, such as street trees and pervious pavement, to reduce storm-water runoff. Green infrastructure should be incorporated in projects undertaken by the City, and the UDO should require it and other strong water management measures in private development projects.
- Expanding the urban forest by planting large street trees to store carbon and to shade buildings, streets, sidewalks, and parking lots, with the goal of reducing ambient air temperatures and energy consumption for air conditioning.

C. Given the urgency of the climate crisis, what policies and programs will you implement to curb greenhouse gas emissions and under what timeline will these policies and programs be implemented?

I will expand city investment in renewable energy with the goal of our city hall becoming climate neutral by 2030. I will promote the transition of municipal vehicles to electric, promote the proliferation of public electric vehicle charging stations, and seek state and federal funding for technology that reduces our energy use. I will promote energy efficiency in the construction, maintenance, and use of City buildings. I support smart land use, concentrating most development in and near our urban core to reduce the length of motor vehicle trips; Complete Streets, to make it easier and more attractive to walk and bike instead of using cars; and regulations that promote energy efficiency and the use of reflective and green building materials in new development.

**3. Unified Development Ordinance (UDO):** For several years, the city of Saratoga Springs has been engaged in a complete rewriting of the city's zoning ordinance. This Unified Development Ordinance is ostensibly the most important regulatory document in the city and will direct land use and development standards for years. The UDO is slated to be voted on after the election, on November 16.

A. Do you believe the draft UDO contains adequate sustainability measures, including protections for our natural resources and mitigations for addressing the climate crisis, to satisfy the vision laid out in the 2015 Comprehensive Plan? Please explain your answer.

The city of Saratoga Springs is “the city in the country,” with a center of compact

residential and commercial development, surrounded by a "greenbelt" – a large area of low-density residential and agricultural uses in the outer portions of the city. The greenbelt is an extremely valuable asset, preserving a sense of rural character outside of the city's core while concentrating the impacts of development and transportation within the core, and protecting sensitive environmental features such as wetlands and open spaces. I believe the current draft of the UDO goes a long way toward implementing the vision of the 2015 Comprehensive Plan. However, I am concerned about a number of issues identified by Sustainable Saratoga, especially that the draft adds a number of uses in the rural residential zone that are not allowed in our current zoning ordinance, and there are clauses that allow the planning board to exempt projects from the requirements of the ordinance, without any criteria.

B. Given the intense and persistent development pressure on the greenbelt, what is your assessment of the effectiveness of the UDO to protect this city resource?

Again, I am concerned that the draft UDO adds uses in the rural residential zone, which covers pretty much the same area as the greenbelt, that are not allowed under our current zoning ordinance, even though the vision of our current Comprehensive Plan is almost identical to the previous one. As the climate crisis deepens, it is essential that we continue to lead the way toward climate-smart land use with a UDO that prevents sprawl development and preserves natural areas with strong, enforceable protections for our greenbelt.

C. If elected, what additional measures would you take, if any, to ensure the continued existence of the city's greenbelt?

Should the UDO be adopted without sufficient protections for the greenbelt, I would support amendments to strengthen it. I would elevate the profile of the greenbelt by specifically identifying it as a city asset and describing it and its benefits on the city website. I would support the posting of signs on prominent roads where they enter the greenbelt. I would support continued funding for the completion of the Greenbelt Trail.

#### **4. Affordable Housing:**

A. What steps will you take toward achieving increased opportunities for diverse and affordable housing (both rental and ownership) for both middle- and lower-income levels?

Lack of affordable housing is a major issue in Saratoga Springs. Many people who work in our community, cannot afford to live here. It would be much better socially and environmentally to have affordable housing within the city limits than to force workers

to commute long distances from surrounding communities. Though our current zoning ordinance offers voluntary incentives for the inclusion of affordable units in new development projects, the incentives have not worked. Few affordable units have been built voluntarily. A number of new affordable housing projects partially financed with state and federal assistance have been approved. While I support them, I know that they will not come close to meeting the need. While I would support additional projects of this kind, it would be better to include a range of housing prices in every neighborhood, rather than separating neighborhoods by income. I would seek to work with those already engaged with this issue, and identify opportunities and strategies that will expand the city's previous efforts to create affordable housing, especially learning from some innovative solutions being pursued by other cities in NY State. Shelters of Saratoga and Business for Good Foundation, the Saratoga Housing Authority, RISE Healthy Housing and Support Services, and the Saratoga Affordable Housing Group are among those I would consult.

- B. Would you support inclusionary zoning (or some other proposal) to promote affordable housing in Saratoga?

Affordable housing is a critical element of a sustainable future for Saratoga Springs. I would support more projects exclusively devoted to affordable housing through state and federal assistance, similar to those currently under way. However, it would be better to include a range of housing prices in every neighborhood than to separate neighborhoods by income. I know that Sustainable Saratoga has been promoting the adoption of an inclusionary zoning ordinance by the city for a long time. I understand that there has been opposition from developers, and that the city would incur some ongoing expense for administering the program. Nevertheless, I would support a renewed discussion about inclusionary zoning with the new City Council and the people of the city.

**5. Sustainable Saratoga's Role:**

- A. What are your thoughts about working in cooperation with Sustainable Saratoga in helping the city achieve greater sustainability features and environmental protections?

I welcome collaboration with environmental experts to improve the future of our city. I strongly support the work of Sustainable Saratoga. I am impressed by the many ways you have benefited the city, from the Weibel Avenue solar array to the urban forestry program to the annual Saratoga Recycles Day. I look forward to working closely with you and others in my efforts to foster a more sustainable Saratoga Springs.

- B. If elected, would you be receptive to a mid-term follow-up with Sustainable Saratoga, to review sustainability progress, obstacles, and possible ways we can work together?

I would be receptive to hearing Sustainable Saratoga's issues and concerns.