

2021 Candidate Sustainability Questionnaire

DCY->To be upfront, this is number 33/4 of these candidate questionnaires that I have filled out. For this reason, some of the answers have been used in other places.

1. General Sustainability:

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

It is the role of local, municipal government to do two things:

1. The first is risk management. We need to plan for what we in software call “FUD” (failure, uncertainty, disaster). Doing this means understanding the cost of different disasters not only in terms of money but city resources, and then finding financially viable solutions and that effectively prevent the worst possible outcomes.
2. Disaster response and resiliency. There are unforeseen circumstances in the changing climate and our aging infrastructure. By having a coherent plan to prevent or mitigate damage, we can better serve our citizens. One key element of this is having disbursement mechanisms for aid and services in a disaster that is known to all citizens. Having people inundate our phone systems looking for specific and immediate responses makes it difficult to prioritize resources. One example would be a coherent and specific snowplow plan that is shared with emergency responders, DPW employees, and residents. To further explain this example: I would like to optimize and publish intended snow plow routes. Intended, because it is understood during periods of emergency resources need to be reallocated. But, we should be able to say for every X number of inches, here is the plan, and here is an average (3-5 hours), how long it takes us to execute it. So if it snows 12 inches, a plow should be coming through X number of times over 24 hours. This snow plow route would focus first on emergency thoroughfares and main arterials used for emergency services, commuting, and schools. It would then branch out the neighborhoods. The published map would not include each neighborhood, but information about these chosen emergency routes and arterials. Examples of key streets would be Broadway, Lake Avenue, Church Street, streets for buses to school, West and East Avenue, etc. Streets would be ranked based on their function in the city (hospitals, schools, fire stations, etc).

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

1. Setting up systems to outlive our tenure in politics including finding marketplace solutions for waste management including recycling and composting that are cost-neutral or positive income sources for the city
2. Finding a way to set up a land trust to acquire at-risk properties
3. Increase walkability by updating our sidewalk laws and ordinances

2. Climate Crisis:

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

The local government should help support marketplace solutions to creating sustainable solutions, including supporting recycling businesses, sustainable farming, energy services, and other sectors that can support our future. They should consider a divestment plan in tools and services that are not adapting to our modern world.

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?

A unified wastewater management strategy. By setting concrete goals and benchmarks for measuring and handling stormwater, runoff, and aquifers we can better adapt to our new climate. This strategy can be used to make decisions and allocate resources when areas of the city are not meeting their benchmarks. The plan can be adaptable, and help better direct funding where it is needed most.

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?

Optimizing routes for snowplows, leaf pickup, and other driving-heavy activities will substantially decrease the city's emissions. It may not sound like a lot, but there was an interesting case study about these types of minute changes or Alaska Airlines (1) making a huge impact on their emissions output.

Additionally, find a way to phase out depreciating fleet vehicles and replace them with efficient solutions. The cost savings in gas usage will offset the increased upfront cost of the vehicles.

(1) <https://investor.alaskaair.com/news-releases/news-release-details/alaska-airlines-most-fuel-efficient-us-carrier>

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.

No, but I do not know if the UDO is the best vehicle for such measures. See below statement as to why I think the entire thing is a farce. What we need is a land trust for the city to buy and protect at-risk properties at their market value, or to partner with a non for profit to create such a land trust. We also need a way to accept gifts of land or abandoned properties and turn them into green spaces.

B. The city of Saratoga Springs has a "greenbelt" – a large area of low-density, low-intensity development in the outer portions of the city – to retain a sense of rural character outside of the city's core while concentrating the impacts of development and transportation within the core, to protect sensitive environmental features such as wetlands and open spaces, and to advance the city's identity as "the City in the Country." 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?

My husband and I own a home adjacent to the greenbelt, so we have seen firsthand how the UDO process is really an exercise that will be completely disregarded in years to come through deal-making and granting variance ordinances. I strongly support the idea of neighborhood-based representation in regards to zoning, with each neighborhood having its own approval board for what gets built and what doesn't.

To an outsider, it can seem like the UDO negotiation has turned into a playing field for favors and retribution. This and the Hotel at The National can be cited as examples. The purpose of the UDO is to set a standard of development that should be adhered to. I hope after this last round of negotiation we end at a place where we can finish this document, protect the greenbelt and open spaces while allowing for thoughtful development in the city and into the future. In an ideal scenario, the city would be districted on a grid, and each district would have representation to decide the specific zoning in their own district within a broader standard. The number of variances given in a case-by-case scenario is annoying at best.

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

I will invest my time into either expanding Saratoga Plan or finding another solution to buy and protect at-risk properties in the greenbelt. I will also work with the accounts commissioner to strictly review building permits to prevent over-subdivision, which is exceedingly common. I want to return farms to farmers. I want to plant trees where clear-cutting has happened. I want to do so many things...but the city has a limited budget and specific resources, so I want to work with you to find this solution.

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?

Affordable housing can be found in a variety of ways. It can be a fund or grant to help offset the cost of mortgages for disenfranchised communities. It can tax subsidies on existing homeowners who are struggling to keep up with contemporary financial demands. There are also development zoning policies and incentivizing builders to build more affordable units. I do not want to expand the public housing program. I am a strong supporter of homeownership as a form of financial and economic equity. Public housing has a habit of segregating disenfranchised communities unintentionally. If management is not up to par, there can be major problems in water quality, snow removal, and other issues. These are all things to consider.

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

Yes, or something similar depending on the scenario.

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? 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?

Yes, I will be for changes orreliant on Sustainable Saratoga as a partner to find these marketplace solutions that are not in the contracts of the union employees of the DPW. It may seem unfortunate that many activities cannot be done by the city because of the way things are structure, but I think with the right mindsight this opens the opportunity for entrepreneurship in our community. I want Saratoga Springs to be known not only as a great community for small business owners but sustainable business owners.

6. Some other ideas

Environmental, where to begin...here are three quick ones...

-Look at ways to reduce carbon emissions with the DPW fleet. Whether this be optimizing routes, or phasing in vehicles that produce lower emissions. This would be a long-term project and the cost of vehicles would come out of the city budget as ongoing replacement of older vehicles happens.

-Dark sky capping on existing city lights. There is grant money for this as a part of the ecological light replacement. (1)

-Recycling bins downtown and drive through self-sort recycling at the transfer station. Then the city can partner with private recyclers who are looking for bulk mass and possibly make money. Many municipalities in New Jersey do this to great success. In the county where my high school was located, they had drive-through recycling days once a month, the county then sold the bulk mass which they knew would come in a specific timeframe for sale, and it was a net positive activity. (2) Many of the current issues with recycling have to do with overseas product sales by private waste collection companies (3) We could even just start with paper which is the easiest product to sell to recyclers and producers (4).

Technological, where to begin...here are four quick ones

-Put the city on a grid, publish and sort paving lists, light replacement plans, and other DPW projects based on the grid. The cost of this is the time to just do it. But putting in this basic informational infrastructure lays the groundwork for more in-depth programming. Information hierarchy and data sorting are key to scaling. A local municipality with a similar plan in Wilton, New York. Located just north of Route 50, and in the same school district as Saratoga Springs. You can find their map on page 22 of their comprehensive water plan. (5) We could easily digitize a map like this of Saratoga. A basic search performed on August 3, 2021, on the city's website showed that we have no such plan easily accessible. (6)

-RFIDs or Bluetooth tracking on the plow and debris trucks with waypoint markers to show progress and real-time location of the trucks. RFIDs would be best because they do not require power. This can be found through state and federal funding. There is actual federal research around this dating to 2001 because this technology is that old. (7)

-Enumeration and ticketing of reported issues. Free and common practice. Please see Pizza Delivery Company "Dominos" for more details about how common this is. (8) Just takes the time to put the system in place. We already have the technology with Nixel to do something like this, but we don't have a clear data management system that is easily navigable. To be redundant: Information hierarchy and data sorting are key to scaling. The township of Gloucester, NJ uses Nixel as a gateway tool for this! (9)

-Integrated dispatch with the police for non-emergency issues. We already have the technology, we just don't use it to its fullest extent. (9--see this one again, Gloucester uses Nixel).

We are behind in both environmental and technological initiatives. Thinking systematically about sustainability means putting in strategic plans that pay for themselves not only through cost savings but possibly making money. The longer we wait to start phasing out old equipment or old practices, the greater the cost will be in the future to catch up. Right now, we are at a pivot point where the state has funding earmarked for municipalities to do such upgrades. We have been able to use some of these programs in a piecemeal fashion, but we can do more. We do not know if the money will be there in the future. We need to start going after more of it.

We should also work with Saratoga PLAN to expand our options for land preservation through a trust. Many properties in the greenbelt will turnover in the next 5-20 years, and they will be sold to developers who will continue to disregard local ordinances or try to cut deals to not pay for infrastructure unless we can find a way to designate land forever wild in perpetuity. Technology and the environment are core to DPW, and though I am being short in this section. You can go through item by item to describe the problem and solution, but what I am offering as a candidate is a systematic approach to every problem wherein the solution will most often take the environment and technology into consideration.

Section Citations

- (1) Lighting and Controls Programs and Incentives, Put Energy to Work, New York State <https://www.nyserda.ny.gov/nY/PutEnergyToWork/Energy-Program-and-Incentives/Lighting-and-Controls-Programs-and-Incentives>
- (2) RECYCLING & SOLID WASTE MANAGEMENT, Somerset County New Jersey, <https://www.co.somerset.nj.us/government/public-works/recycling>
- (3) "Recycling in the U.S. Is Broken. How Do We Fix It?," March 13, 2020, Columbia University <https://news.climate.columbia.edu/2020/03/13/fix-recycling-america/>
- (4) A List of Paper Recycling Plants and Producers in the US <https://www.enfreycling.com/directory/paper-plant/United-States>
- (5) Town of Wilton Comprehensive Water Plan, Dated 2007 <https://water.townofwilton.com/wwsa/assets/File/WWSA-Comprehensive-Plan.pdf>
- (6)

The screenshot shows a search results page on the City of Saratoga Springs website. The search query is "comprehensive sewage and wastewater plan". The results list several documents, including:

- CPC mtg 1 051413 Final Presentation - May 30, 2018
- RFP 2018-09 Notice to bidders Sanitary Wastewater Pump Station Upgrades - Nov 10, 2018
- City of Saratoga-Springs-Community-Profile - Oct 12, 2017
- CPC mtg 1 051413 summary - May 30, 2018
- March 22, 2007 Minutes (PDF) - Aug 10, 2015
- Comprehensive Plan 2001 (PDF) - Aug 7, 2014
- 2020 Comprehensive Budget Presentation - Oct 2, 2019
- PRIVATE SEWAGE DISPOSAL SYSTEM - Sep 20, 2019
- Pitney Bowes Submission FINAL Version 02-14-2017 - Feb 15, 2017

- (7) "Safe Plowing - Applying Intelligent Vehicle Technology" US DOT Federal Highway Administration Jan/Feb 2001 <https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/publications/publicroads/01janfeb/safeplow.cfm>
- (8) Paving for Pizza, Domino's Pizza. <https://pavingforpizza.com/>
- (9) "GTPD Community Bulletin: How To Report A Pothole In Gloucester Township" Township of Gloucester NJ. February 15th, 2019 <https://local.nixle.com/alert/7113080/?desktop> and <https://glotwp.com/department/public-works/>