

2023 GGPR Park Ridge Alderperson Candidate Questions and Responses:

Few understand that the resolve to address the current climate crisis will be driven by individual communities. Implementing sustainable practices within local communities will significantly affect the comprehensive effects of climate change.

One significant way to address the current climate crisis is to implement municipal composting.

Food waste in landfills accounts for a significant amount of potent greenhouse gasses. However composting food scraps can turn food waste into soil amendments instead. In order to reduce Park Ridge's greenhouse gas emissions and address the broader impact of climate change, are you in favor of offering food scrap collection year round when the City's solid waste and recycling contract is negotiated? Why or why not? (The cities' waste contract is up for renewal in April 2024)

John Bennett (7th Ward): My family has been utilizing the food composting services from Collective Resource long before the city implemented the current program. My family has reduced the amount of garbage going to the landfill by actively recycling and composting. We are down to one bag of garbage a week! I fully support continuing this program and encourage new ideas that will help in the reduction of waste.

Mwende Lefler (7th Ward): In general, I don't think any potential solutions to the current climate crisis should be dismissed out of hand. We can and should take any potential project and weigh the costs and benefits, including both the social and environmental benefits. It is understood that a governing body is limited in funds that can be expended - projects need to be selected and prioritized where societal, environmental, and monetary benefits are all considered against the costs.

In answer to the specific question, I would be in favor of offering food scrap collection when the waste and recycling contract is negotiated. Food waste via landfill gases does affect climate change and reducing our contribution to greenhouse gases is both a societal and environmental benefit. Depending on the fee structure, this has the potential to save money, as well (cost of collecting waste for composting versus cost of landfill waste). As landfills continue to fill up, the cost to landfill items could continue to rise - this would help diversify where our waste is going and prepare us for the future. I also believe more people would participate if this program were offered at a City scale.

Alice Dobrinski (5th Ward): Yes, I lean toward including this as a service the city provides all residents alongside solid waste and recycling, and would like to see this discussed during the Budgeting Workshops later this year. As executing environmental stability is cited as a major goal in strategic priority areas of the Park Ridge 2023-2026 Strategic Plan, it is appropriate that city staff and council discuss adding this when the waste contract is renewed.

Joseph Steinfels (5th Ward): I support any method of decreasing waste, including through the City's offering a food scrap collection program. If the City were to offer a food scrap collection, it would decrease waste (on average) by 22% per household. As some food scrap/composting programs allow for collection of paper/pizza boxes, yard waste, as well as all food categories (including meat/bones/shells), we would see a much lower yield of "landfill waste." Of note, twenty-seven cities in Lake County currently provide a food scrap collection/composting option for their cities. I think it's about time that Park Ridge step up and offer this to our community.

When it comes time to renegotiate the contract, we should certainly include conversation and inclusion of a food scrap collection/composting program.

Municipalities across the region are defining their role in making a commitment to sustainability by enacting policies, updating regulations, educating stakeholders, and appointing a sustainability director or allocating staff to manage sustainability.

2. What is the city's role in making Park Ridge a more sustainable place? How do you see forward movement being made on Park Ridge's Sustainability Plan? How should the Sustainability Commission work with city staff to accomplish these goals? What resources do you support the city using to accomplish these goals (e.g. staff time, budget items, city communications)? Sustainability Commission & Plan

John Bennett (7th Ward): The community as a whole has a responsibility to be good stewards of the environment. The city can lead the way by embracing and adopting plans that can accomplish those goals. Plans to help reduce energy costs, reduce waste going to landfills, and improve transportation infrastructure are just some of the ideas that can be implemented to accomplish those goals. The formation of the Sustainability Commission was a good step by the city to help come up with ideas that can be used to accomplish those goals. The role of the Sustainability Commission is advisory. Its role is to come up with ideas, do the research, and recommend to city council the way to achieve its goals. I realize that the commission may need support from city staff for data or guidance. The city council has the responsibility to accept and approve the ideas and concepts they want staff to work on. As an Alderperson, I will support the Sustainability Commission in making sure they have the tools necessary to get the job done.

Mwende Lefler (7th Ward): Many of the factors that would make a City more sustainable, such as waste and water management and reduction, promoting green spaces, bike- and walkability, and energy reduction, involve policies, decisions, and infrastructure investment that are made at the municipal level. The City of Park Ridge has developed and committed to a Sustainability Plan approved by City Council. The policy statements are really the first step in making Park Ridge more sustainable - the next steps are developing the plans, evaluating the options, and allocating resources and budget as needed to help realize the policies.

I believe forward movement is poised to happen now. There have been countless hours put into the Task Force, the development of the plan, and the commission by talented volunteers that are experts in their fields. In an effort to get movement with the plan, a work plan was developed to break the bigger issues down into smaller tasks. As with any large undertaking, it can be overwhelming to decide how to make progress. The Sustainability Commission was asked to weigh in on prioritizing the work plan and has done a great job at identifying the tasks that would absolutely require City staff time to be able to move forward on as well as tasks that can continue based on volunteer hours. At this point, it seems that taking the smaller steps to follow the plan would be the forward movement needed to gain momentum and take larger steps in the future.

I think a partnership between the City and the Commission is very important and I'm in favor of City resources (time and budget) being utilized for Sustainability efforts as we have prioritized these efforts as a City. At this point, we do not have a dedicated Sustainability Director position, so there are limited pools of time available from current staff. That being said, I do think that the tasks being asked of the City in the prioritized work plan are very doable and conscientious of their time. In addition, part of the work of sustainability is education and training to look for opportunities to incorporate sustainable practices into aspects of all projects. As the work of the Commission with the input and direction of the City progresses, I anticipate the City will find positive projects to move forward with and will allocate resources to meet these goals.

Alice Dobrinsky (7th Ward): Municipalities are increasingly tasked with providing sustainability solutions because the impacts of climate change quite literally show up at our doorsteps and in our basements.

Based on what I observed during the January 23, 2023 City Council meeting, the Sustainability Commission is at a place where they need to work with city staff to determine which items they shared during their presentation are feasible at this time to create a “forced-ranked list.” I support that cost of staff time, because that is proper planning that would result in a ranked list.

Meeting minutes confirm that the Mayor is following up with the City Manager and Sustainability Commission Liaison on this. Initially I thought that meant permission had been granted to speak with staff, but it’s unclear where this stands as there are no minutes or video from the February 1, 2023 Sustainability Commission meeting.

Robust, lasting solutions to bigger issues often span departments and governments. Developing them takes the time and effort of specialists, which is why I support the city working with our other local taxing bodies to hire a Sustainability Coordinator / Director to help close gaps, pull everything together, and be a strong sustainability resource for our community.

Joseph Steinfelds (5th Ward): First, I think that the progress already made is admirable. I recognize that we still have a long way to go, but the progression from nothing to a Sustainability Task Force to a Sustainability Commission to (potentially, after last week’s City Council meeting) increased access to City Administration in just a few short years is inspiring. Go Green Park Ridge can take credit for creating the impetus and continuing to maintain pressure on community leaders. That said, we have more to do.

I think one big “next step” is the hiring of a staff position to coordinate sustainability measures (adoption of, policy advice to City Leaders, etc.). At the Council Meeting, the suggestion was made (thanks Cindy) to co-use an employee with the Park District. I think the allocation of money to hire staff positions would be a logical benchmark in the adoption of more sustainable measures for our City.

I have always adopted a philosophy of “live the change you want to see” through which I can individually (and us as a City) demonstrate and encourage behaviors we want others (and society writ large) to emulate. By adopting (and teaching about) sustainable opportunities, we not only set a standard of environmental stewardship but we also encourage behaviors we want our community to adopt. Examples of these behaviors include the above-mentioned composting, adopting LED lighting in city-owned light posts, planting more trees and vegetation on City-owned property, and installing more bike racks (& skateboard/scooter security measures) in vicinity of our schools, Uptown area, and mass transit facilities. This methodology also allows for a less-confrontational (“softer”) means to accomplish (and encourage) societal change.

There are times, however, when “soft power” will not work. Flooding is a considerable problem (especially for 5th Ward residents), and it is getting worse due to the convergence of significant development (without appropriate retention measures) as well as trends of increased precipitation. To resolve flooding, the City must act with more directive authority. Ordinances must be enforced to ensure that additional commercial or residential multi-unit development provides adequate offsets for stormwater retention and creates lag-time distribution runoff so as not to overwhelm capability.

Last, we need to ensure that we are doing appropriate research and planning to deal with sustainability and infrastructure issues. Unfortunately, we are finding that some of our plans once implemented are not as effective as we had hoped. For instance, the green alley projects

and Main City Parking Lot (next to the library) installed brick pavers to allow for water to permeate into the earth instead of creating run-off. While environmentally and aesthetically sound, the layer of famous Park Ridge clay (from which our famous bricks used to be made) is shallower than we had anticipated, resulting in water being unable to permeate the layers as effectively as thought leading to pooling and in some cases, suspected flooding. The lesson is that we may need to do a more substantial soil study in order to better design the water collection and run-off plan. I think the presence of a salaried staff member focused on sustainability issues might have helped us to avoid any problems.

To conclude, the City is the “glue” that holds together all the disparate entities in our community: homeowners, tenants, businesses, the park district, schools, nonprofit organizations, citizens, stakeholders, etc. If we are to truly navigate towards a more sustainable future, the City will continue to play a key role.