



Sierra Club

2023 Primary Mayoral Candidate Questionnaire

Q: If elected, do you pledge to be a champion for climate change mitigation in Philadelphia - to make the goals of 100% clean energy, affordable by all, and the achievement of “net zero” carbon emissions citywide by 2050 or sooner a top policy and budget priority throughout all branches of government, and to regularly promote those priorities to the citizens of Philadelphia?

A: I believe climate change is a very real threat to our future and we all have an obligation to do what we can to stop it. As mayor, I will make protecting and preserving our environment a priority, including by improving recycling, supporting tree replanting and investing in our parks.

Q: The Mayor and Council each appoint two candidates to serve on the Gas Commission. Will you guarantee that any appointments you make to the Philadelphia Facilities Management Commission and Gas Commission will be individuals who are committed to: bringing Philadelphia Gas Works’ practices into alignment with the city’s climate goals (of achieving carbon neutrality by 2050); a just transition for PGW workers; and advocating for public transparency regarding PGW operations and finances?

A: As Mayor, I will appoint experienced, knowledgeable, industry experts to the Gas Commission who will support my Administration’s goals of meeting the city’s climate goals. I believe that PGW will have to be a significant part of the conversation around how best to meet those goals. As you know, PGW serves more than 500,000 households, 25% of which live at or below poverty. Many, although not all, ratepayers may not be able to afford the transition to renewable energy without significant financial assistance in the coming years unless and until renewable energy becomes significantly more affordable. Of course, lower income PGW customers already have their bills subsidized by

other payers so, in theory, a full transition could require significant government resources. Moreover, with as many renters as the city has – we recently became a city with a majority of renters – it is also possible that small investor-owned properties would not be able to afford the transition. As much as I would like to believe it would be the responsibility of the owners to shoulder the burden, I do not want to risk some being unable to afford it, putting renters at risk of becoming unhoused. I would commit to ensuring full public transparency regarding PGW operations and finances to the extent those disclosures do not endanger the safety of the public or any community.

Q: Will you support legislation requiring PGW’s budget plans and operations to align with the City of Philadelphia’s goal/pledge to achieving net zero emissions by 2050?

<https://www.phila.gov/2021-01-15-city-commits-to-carbon-neutrality-by-2050-releases-climate-action-playbook-and-hires-first-chief-resilience-officer/>

A: I would not. I believe the market for renewables is rapidly changing and as renewables become more affordable, we will be able to quickly move from fossil fuels. However, as explained above, I do not want to, via an artificial deadline, put people who cannot afford to transition away from fossil fuels at risk of becoming unhoused.

Q: Would you support extending the LIHEAP program so that it provides year-round support (providing cooling, as well as heating assistance) to low-income PECO customers? Given what we know about the increasing dangers of heat-related deaths in the region, would you advocate for and implement a ban on electricity shut-offs during the summer? Would you support a ban on the installation of new gas connections in new residential housing/construction?

A: I would support extending LIHEAP to make it year-round, yes. I would not support a permanent ban on shut offs during the summer, although I would support a higher bar. No one wants to pay the bills of someone who could pay, but does not want to because they know they can’t have it turned off. People who can’t pay should be helped, but people who simply won’t pay should be at risk of losing access to power. As long as PGW is in operation and providing good jobs and low cost energy, especially to the 25% of its

customers who live at or below the poverty line, I would not support a blanket ban on new gas connections.

Q: The existing steam loop has the potential to cost-effectively decarbonize large buildings as its operator, Vicinity, has plans to transition to 100% renewable energy. However, PGW is actively working to undercut the steam loop's customer base, and force Vicinity to build a new gas pipeline for current operations, which could delay the investment in clean energy. Will you work to support the steam loop's transition to renewable heating, and prevent PGW from undermining this effort?

A: This is more complicated than this question makes it appear. It is my understanding that PGW built the lines Vicinity is using and Vicinity is currently suing PGW to gain control over those lines. It is not clear how PGW could function if it loses control over a significant portion of the lines it owns and maintains. As you know, PGW is subsidized by customers who can pay their bills so for them to give away control of these lines may risk higher prices for their customers while effectively subsidizing Vicinity.

Q: Construction and Demolition, or C&D Waste, is a by-product of home and commercial renovation, demolition, and new construction. Highly recyclable, this waste has its own legal classification and handling requirements. As much as 20 percent of waste collected by the City of Philadelphia is C&D waste, and to avoid the expense of proper disposal, contractors and unlicensed haulers dump the waste in parks, vacant lots, and public streets all over Philadelphia. Studies report that \$48 million per year is spent in Philadelphia on clean-up and anti-litter programs with no discernible result.

If elected, will you make enforcement of dumping regulations a priority with adequate staffing and funding to stop the trashing of our city, particularly in Environmental Justice neighborhoods?

A: Yes, I will make this a priority in every neighborhood (recognizing that a significant portion of illegal dumping, if not a majority, occurs in Environmental Justice neighborhoods). I will move to clean every lot in my first 100 days, install monitoring capabilities at and around frequent dumping locations, and dramatically increase the penalties for illegal dumping including, not limited to the loss of any professional licenses a company may have.

Of course, however, that is not enough: the city must do more to fully staff the Department of Licenses and Inspections to better handle any demolition and construction projects, ensure only licensed and responsible firms are doing work in the city, and that sites are regularly monitored. Preventing dumping is the best way to ensure that C&D waste is minimized.

Q: Public appreciation for parks and green spaces has increased dramatically in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, as Philadelphia’s residents have sought out the physical and psychological benefits of connecting with nature and pursuing passive as well as active outdoor recreation. Covid also shined a bright light on disparities in access to neighborhood parks and playgrounds across the City, a problem further aggravated by public safety concerns. Recognizing that access to nearby nature and the outdoors should be available to all, regardless of race and income, the Sierra Club, as an organization, has embraced the goal of cutting the “nature equity gap”^[1] in half by 2030, ensuring that an additional 50 million people across the country can exercise the human right to connect with the outdoors.

Will you commit to appointing a Parks and Recreation Commissioner who has demonstrated experience in conservation of natural resources, and expertise in stewarding the role of our natural public lands in climate resilience?

A: Yes.

Q: Will you commit to fully fund the Philadelphia Parks and Recreation budget, rejecting privatization of public space as a funding method? Further, will you commit to funding the services necessary to ensure safe and regular access to neighborhood parks and playgrounds, equitably across Philadelphia?

A: I will commit to fully funding the Philadelphia Parks and Recreation budget and commit to funding the services necessary to ensure safe and regular access to neighborhood parks and playgrounds, equitably across Philadelphia.

I will not commit to a blanket rejection of any private operator working in or around a city park for two reasons: City government currently has had a significant problem filling vacancies and, although not my preference, I would use private vendors to provide services rather than risk loss of access to a

park, rec center or pool. Secondly, we want to make the parks, rec centers and pools attractive to users and I do not want to commit to banning vendors if having, as just one example, a food vendor that would attract more people to use the resource as it generates income.

With the closure of the golf course in FDR Park, remarkable ecological regeneration has occurred in portions of the park, use for passive recreation and food production has flourished, and the abundance of birds and wildlife has increased dramatically. The park's trees and other vegetation are undervalued by the FDR Park Master Plan and have significant ecological benefit: as habitat, in capturing stormwater and attenuating flooding and in heat island effect mitigation. The Plan was finalized in 2019, before COVID and without sufficient transparency and inclusive engagement of South Philadelphia residents. The plan fails to reflect the priorities and values of many in the community.

Q: Do you support the call for a moratorium on the current Master Plan, and will you support a transparent and community-driven process to arrive at an amended plan that serves all of South Philadelphia?

A: I believe there was significant, and ongoing, public input into the planning process. The multi-year process included thousands of respondents, multiple public meetings, and significant stakeholder engagement. It will take decades to complete the new plan, and there is ample time to make any amendments that will make it better for every user. For that reason, I would not support a moratorium on the process or redevelopment.

Q: Abundant street trees and woodlands are essential to the health of urban areas - purifying our air, providing shade and heat mitigation, providing essential ecosystem services. Philadelphia's tree canopy has been in decline in recent decades, with a documented loss of 6% over the 2008-2018 period. Tree coverage is also widely unequal among neighborhoods, reflecting historic redlining and disinvestment. Sierra Club strongly supports the City of Philadelphia's recently adopted goal of achieving 30% tree coverage in each neighborhood, and the draft Tree Plan's commitment to prioritizing the addition and restoration of trees in the neighborhoods with the greatest deficits.

a) Sierra Club supports the recently passed legislation sponsored by Councilwoman Richardson which prioritizes tree protection and replacement during development projects. However, exceptions for

restoration projects can result in harmful clear-cutting that destroys tree canopy and forfeits flood absorptive capacity of trees (see Cobbs Creek Golf Course, FDR wetlands). Will you work to ensure Philadelphia's public parks and open spaces are managed to maximize retention of the existing tree canopy, and ensure loopholes in current tree protection legislation are closed?

A: Yes.

Q: Will you support the enforcement of tree protection ordinances and the investment of City funds to ensure full implementation of the Tree Plan and achievement of the 30% goal?

A: Yes.

Q: Currently, Philadelphia's single use plastic bag ban does not include polystyrene foam food service products (which is included in other state's bag bans such as California and New Jersey). The Federal government has also initiated single use plastic bans. Following suit, will you support and advocate for other bans to help Pennsylvania reduce single use plastic pollution?

A: Yes.

Q: Will you advocate for stronger recycling laws to meet Pennsylvania's growing demands to ensure that plastic waste can be properly recycled? Philadelphia is failing to meet the goals set in its recycling law. The Pennsylvania Resources Council and Penn Environment recently published a report with recommendations for better managing plastic waste.^[2]

A: I would focus on properly implementing our current recycling laws, which does not happen today, before advocating for any new laws. We need to see what can work before enacting new laws.

Q: What is your biggest achievement for the environment to date?

A: I am very proud to have been a consistent supporter of environmentally friendly programs while on Council, including the creation of the Solar Panel Incentive Program, and to be a consistent supporter of SEPTA, including the banning of on-street parking in some neighborhoods in order to allow for more mass transit. I also opposed what was described as a temporary ban on electric car street parking, but which has continued for six (6) years.

Q: What are your top environmental priorities as a candidate for Mayor?

A: My top environmental priority as mayor will be to ensure that Philadelphia becomes a city that is cleaner and safer, through regular street and lot cleaning. Additionally, we must properly handle the waste we create and dramatically increase recycling. I want to reduce the amount of recycled materials that end up in landfills or worse, being incinerated. My goal is to double the amount of material that is recycled every year. I will also support full funding for the city's parks, rec centers and pools and programs to increase the planting and maintenance of our tree canopy.

^[1] The Nature Gap refers to the inequitable distribution of nature access (i.e. parks, green spaces) in the US. A recent [report](#) found that Black, Latinx and Asian communities are three times as likely, and Indigenous communities twice as likely, than white communities to live in a "nature-deprived" community. Currently [100 million people](#) in the US - including 28 million children - do not live within walking/rolling distance of a safe quality park, with the greatest disparities in access found in communities of color. These same communities are most likely to be on the front lines of the climate crisis; greening efforts can reduce climate impacts such as flooding and urban heat island effects.

^[2] <https://prc.org/app/uploads/2022/05/Act-101-Review-and-Recommendations-FINAL-ACTIVE-VERSION-May-2022.pdf>