

SPC Livable Communities Agenda Questions for 2024 Candidates

Response from Claire Snyder-Hall, Candidate for Delaware State House Representative District 14

1. What can elected officials do to preserve open spaces including forests? Are new ordinances or legislation needed? What should be the priority?

Legislation is needed to preserve open spaces, including forests, because market-driven decisions incentivize development because builders want to make money. Ideally, the legislature represents the people and should act to protect the public good. A lot of times that does not happen because legislators are in the pockets of big monied special interests. Thus, it is important to elect people who care about the public good and are willing to fight for it.

There are a lot of things that government can do to preserve open spaces. 1) Government can continue to purchase land and establish conservation easements to protect critical habitats and open spaces. 2) It can implement or enforce zoning laws that limit development in sensitive areas, including buffer zones around forests and wetlands. 3) Government can partner with conservation groups, such as the Sussex County Land Trust and the Nanticoke Conservancy. 4) And it can allocate budget funds for land preservation and offer incentives to private landowners to conserve their land. Along with these approaches, we need public education to foster understanding of what is at stake and why government action is important.

2. Clean water is fundamental to community health. What specific policies or practices are critical to ensuring that all waterways are clean and healthy?

Clean water is essential for life, but unfortunately our waterways and groundwater are contaminated because of agricultural run-off and rapid development. A recent report by the Center for Inland Bays (CIB) gives our waterways a grade of D. We need to strengthen environmental protections to improve water quality and also make better land use decisions. We need increased buffers and a decrease in clear-cutting of land prior to development. The General Assembly should take decisive action when county government fails to address critical problems.

I would like to see the General Assembly act to strengthen environmental regulations and enforcement, support improved wastewater management, including septic system maintenance, promote sustainable agriculture, and implement green infrastructure projects and public spaces. I would also like to see subsidized water testing and filtration systems for homeowners in Sussex County.

3. What do you consider the most critical infrastructure problems facing Sussex County, and how do you propose to address those problems?

Eastern Sussex is experiencing rapid overdevelopment without adequate infrastructure, and that is threatening our quality of life and making our communities less livable. It is my belief that the top consideration when approving new development should be the quality of life for the people who live here. While land-use decisions are largely a county council concern, there are things that the

General Assembly could do to make things better. For example, it could pass an adequate public facilities ordinance that would require adequate infrastructure be in place before builders build, it could strengthen environmental regulations to preserve clean water and slow the erosion of our shorelines, and it could require impact fees that are commensurate with the increased community needs that accompany growth. The General Assembly could do those things to address the problems in eastern Sussex, and I would support them.

4. Do you think Sussex County has a good balance between personal rights and community rights? If so, please explain your thinking. If not, how would you work to create a better balance?

I do not believe that community rights and the public good receive enough attention in Sussex County. I believe the public should be actively involved in the creation of our county's comprehensive plan, and that the County Council should follow the plan that is created. We must make sure the planning process is participatory, transparent, and accountable. And public meetings must be well-publicized in advance, so people can attend.

5. Can and should the working relationship between state and local officials be improved? If so, why and how?

State and local officials should work together for better and more efficient policymaking and governance. We could improve the relationship between the two by fostering communication, collaboration, and mutual understanding.

6. Is there anything else you wish to add?

I have been very active in Delaware politics for 13 years, including 5 as the head of Common Cause Delaware. Through that work, I have developed a strong network of good relationships on the ground in Dover and across the state. I have a proven track record of getting things done in Dover, working with legislators, organizations, and community members. I am eager to get to Dover so that I can work to make things better for our district, county, and state. I support a pro-environmental agenda and am proud to be endorsed by Dustyn Thompson, one of Delaware's top environmental leaders, as well as retired Rep. John Kowalko, who was named one of Delaware Today's "People of Influence" for his work on environmental issues, including offshore wind.