



# SUSTAINABLE LOUDOUN


Loudoun County Committee for a Sustainable Society

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## **BOS Candidates Discuss Positions on Environmental Initiatives**



The Loudoun County Committee for a Sustainable Society (LCCSS) surveyed Loudoun County Board of Supervisors candidates last month regarding their positions on environmental issues. A summary of their responses follows. The completed questionnaires are available on our website at <http://www.sustainableloudoun.org/2007>.

The LCCSS survey asked about initiatives for public schools, as well as opinions on broader topics, such as green building standards and carbon emissions. The questionnaire was sent to 19 candidates, with 11 respondents. The following BOS candidates chose not to respond and their opinions are not reflected in this summary: Firetti (R-Chairman), Albright (R-Blue Ridge), Ryan (I-Broad Run), Snow (R-Dulles), Clem (R-Leesburg), Tulloch (R-Potomac), Delgaudio (R-Sterling), Staton (R-Sugarland Run). The only initiative that was unanimously supported by respondents is drafting green building standards legislation and creating incentives for public and private investment in green buildings. Expressing a common sentiment, Buckley (D-Sugarland Run) said, "Building green is one way to simultaneously reduce environmental impacts and increase the efficiency of Loudoun's government by reducing energy costs, especially at a time when energy prices are climbing."

A more varied response was received on the subject of the reinstatement of Loudoun's Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) program. Under a PDR program, landowners can voluntarily sell their development rights to a public or qualified private agency charged with preserving agricultural land. Six respondents supported reinstating this program, four did not support reinstatement, while one respondent reserved judgment on the issue. The main reasons for opposition were the costs, given current budget constraints, and the lack of public access to the properties despite the fact that public funds are used for the acquisition of development rights. Higgins (R-Leesburg) indicated that he did not support reinstating the PDR program, but might favor a Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) program instead. Since respondents largely supported "measures for preserving and encouraging a sustainable rural economy in Western Loudoun," it appears that the goals of the PDR program are generally supported, but there is disagreement regarding the means to attain those goals.

Several respondents stated that there is no simple answer to reconciling land use initiatives and rural economic initiatives, and that they would try to take a balanced approach in which the viability of rural enterprises would be a major factor. It was also suggested that the best way to ensure viable rural enterprises was through adherence to a comprehensive plan such as the 2001 plan or the Clem-Burton proposal. Miller (D-Dulles) gave specifics about how he would approach a specific conflict between a land use initiative and protecting the viability of a rural enterprise: "I would look for opportunities to avoid irreversible damage to the special characteristics that define rural Loudoun. In the end, when the

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board must vote settle a conflict, I would be inclined to vote for incremental changes, so that the effects can be measured and evaluated, one step at a time, rather than use an all-at-once approach.”

No candidates rejected a comprehensive energy conservation plan for Loudoun County. While two candidates responded that they “may support” such a plan focused on the need for auditing and analysis prior to adopting a plan. Waters (R-Broad Run) noted that the County participates in the Washington Council of Governments (COG) Climate Change Steering Committee, whose work will give counties a framework and data necessary for developing an energy conservation plan and greenhouse gas reduction activities.

Similarly, no candidates rejected adopting a Cool Counties Initiative, as Fairfax County and Arlington currently participate in. Cool Counties is a pledge to reduce global warming emissions 80 percent by 2050, or 2 percent per year. Candidates asserting that they “may support” such an initiative, indicated a desire to learn more about Cool Counties before recommending it.

Only the two responding Independent candidates showed hesitation to endorse policies which reduce the county’s reliance on landfills. Again, however, this was not opposition, but concern that some approaches to achieving this goal may not be feasible or may be counter-productive. For example, Burton (I-Blue Ridge) described some problems that have arisen with County recycling programs. In particular, noting that there is still no market for many recycled materials.

Support for developing a school system-wide Sustainable Schools initiative was mixed. Six Democrats, one Republican, and one Independent endorsed the idea; one Democrat and one Republican said that they would not support the program, and the other Independent indicated that support was possible. No respondents were opposed to the spirit of such an initiative, but thought that other approaches may be more effective or that the schools were already making substantial efforts toward sustainability.

The responding BOS candidates had a lot to say about how future public schools are sited in Loudoun County, the topic was obviously given much consideration. They were asked if they would support policies to “give greater weight to placing appropriately sized schools near the communities they serve.” Three candidates stated that they would not support such policies. Even so, these “No” respondents stressed the need for more cooperation between the Board of Supervisors and the School Board, and more public involvement from the communities most directly affected. Consequently, the “No” respondents do not appear to be opposed to locating schools near communities, or to building different sizes of schools, but advocate a better siting process that will result in reasonable and fair decisions about when and where such schools are feasible. Other respondents commented that the Western School Siting Task Force was a step in the right direction. Waters (R-Broad Run) observed that “Land acquisition is becoming quite challenging, and the cookie-cutter designed school approach is in some cases driving up school costs. This is another reason why the Board of Supervisors and School Board need a more consistent and positive working relationship. I supported establishing a permanent joint School Board and Board of Supervisors Committee to work throughout the year on these types of issues.”

There was uniform support among responding BOS candidates for “changes to the school building standards to accommodate green building principles, which would provide a healthier environment for our children, use resources sustainably and generate life-cycle cost savings for the taxpayers.” To nobody’s surprise, not a single responding candidate is opposed to providing a healthier environment for our children while saving money at the same time. Some respondents mentioned things the school system was already doing in this regard, and others suggested that some approaches may be more cost-effective than others. Many cited studies of other school systems that indicate that the goal of healthier environments at lower life-cycle costs is achievable. It is good to know that the candidates have given this important issue such careful consideration. For example, West (D-Sterling) said, “As energy costs continue to rise, it is crucial that the County adopt innovative school designs which lower energy consumption. Such designs could provide significant energy cost savings over the life of school buildings. Studies have shown that green built schools provide a healthier learning atmosphere for students.”

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LCCSS is a local, community-based, non-partisan group that works to promote environmental stewardship and the sustainable use of resources in Loudoun County. For further information about LCCSS and its activities, contact Tony Noerpel, [anoerpel@loudounwireless.com](mailto:anoerpel@loudounwireless.com), or by phone at 540.882.3289.