



Sierra Club-Potomac River Group Candidate Questionnaire for 2024 Arlington County School Board Election

The Sierra Club is considering endorsing candidates for the upcoming Democratic Caucus for the 2024 School Board election. Our organization, and our endorsements, are nonpartisan. We encourage all candidates to support pro-environment policies.

This questionnaire is an essential part of our candidate endorsement process. Your response to this questionnaire and an in-person interview will be the basis of our endorsement decisions. These questions give you the opportunity to express your opinions, values, and knowledge about climate action, climate justice, environmental protection, and sustainability. Your responses will be posted online and shared with the media upon request.

Please return the completed questionnaire on or before April 3, 2024, to John Bloom, johnbloom@gmail.com.

A. Background Information

Candidate Name: Laurence "Larry" Fishtahler

Current Occupation: Retired – occasional long-term substitute – math, science (Earth Science & Physics)

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Campaign Manager:

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Campaign Address: 2762 N Wakefield St Arlington VA 22207

1. Have you run for public office before? If so, please provide the year and the nature of the candidacy.
Yes – 2003 School Board Arlington VA
2. Please share relevant past involvement on climate and environmental issues. I have been involved in climate change research since the beginning of the USGCRP. I was contractor (Computer Sciences Corp.) support to the Earth Sciences Directorate at GSFC, especially related to the MODIS instrument that flew on the Terra and Aqua spacecraft. I served as liaison to the science team members; see: Standard data products from the MODIS Science Team (<https://ieeexplore.ieee.org/document/606412>). I was an invited reviewer of the Third National Climate Assessment. I was a member of the technical program committee of the International Geoscience and Remote Sensing Symposium (2002). I have participated in research on Arctic Sea Ice loss. I was chairman of the Geoscience and Remote Sensing Society's Technical Committee on Data Standards and Distribution. As a Teacher in APS high schools, I have incorporated the Third, Fourth, and Fifth National Climate Assessment Reports into my Earth Sciences classes.

3. B. Climate change, sustainability and the environment in APS operations

1. Do you support Arlington County's goal of achieving community-wide carbon neutrality by 2050, as established in the County's [Community Energy Plan \(CEP\) and Clean Energy Plan Implementation Roadmap](#)? Yes
2. Do you believe APS should develop a plan to achieve carbon neutrality in its operations and ensure that facility renovations and new facility designs are consistent with the plan? Y substantial net electricity cost savings. Do you support APS exploring 100% renewable electricity for its operations using a similar approach? Yes – with special attention and emphasis on operations.
3. The transition at APS from diesel to electric school buses has been slow. APS has not identified a long-term school bus parking plan to accommodate EV charging and has only applied for, and received, external grant funding for a few electric buses. Do you have ideas for accelerating progress in this area? APS needs a plan for converting to electric school buses, complete with EV charging stations, and for EV charging stations at our schools (this should be done in coordination with the County Board & its planning for conversion to EVs). We will be facing challenging fiscal constraints, but this conversion should be a priority.
4. Do you support creation of an expert commission or similar entity to advise the School Board directly on clean energy, climate justice, climate adaptation, energy resilience, solid waste, environmental health and other climate and environmental issues? Would you be willing to help create such an advisory body? Yes, and I will collaborate with the other School Board members to create such an advisory body.
5. In recent years, APS has had a poor record of recycling and waste reduction. When APS centralized food preparation, that led to a great deal of packaging for meals. Such packaging, along with single-use plastic utensils, now accounts for a large portion of the APS waste stream. Reducing food waste also has been challenging. What would you do to reduce waste and improve recycling at schools? I know from being in our high schools that the level of waste is appalling! Consciousness of this problem needs to be embedded in instruction and in the culture of pride in our schools. Our schools need to measure and report on food waste, recycling, and student behavior related to this problem. We need to collect food waste for composting. We need to set goals, measure, and report progress.
6. What are your top three climate change and environmental priorities for Arlington Public Schools? What steps will you take to achieve them if elected? 1) Minimize APS's contribution to the DC area's "heat island effect." 2) Education of our students and their families about the importance and urgency of environmental issues, what we can do to be part of a positive contribution, and what APS is doing and plans to do (in order to win support for our priorities). 3) Anticipate! Adaptation is required, but too often we are in a posture of reacting to what has happened. From my work for NASA, especially on climate change research, my orientation has been focused on the future – what we understand and what we don't – what confidence we can have in predictions, and where the failure of our climate modeling tells us we really don't understand what is happening – where greater vigilance is needed. It's a mindset that comes with experience. We need to ensure that forward looking mindset is operating in APS's

- facilities and operations planning and is supported in our budgeting. We need to be active in finding new ways of doing things – not just making incremental improvements.
7. You are welcome to share any additional information or views you would like us to consider. (The following are brief descriptions – we can explore more if you are interested.)
- a) Instruction: We need to ensure that environmental and climate change research, policy making, action, and discourse are incorporated in every appropriate course of study – APS needs to take the initiative to do this – no VA SOL will do it. (“Appropriate” includes many classes, including art – inclusion of the Art x Climate section in the Fifth National Climate Assessment (including art by students) is a very welcome addition – students in my Earth Science classes found these art works engaging and meaningful.)
 - b) Exposure: From my teaching experience I know that for many of my students the experience of “Nature” is quite limited, and consequently the importance of environmental concerns is undervalued. There is a whole realm of possibilities to give new meaning to a “field trip” – but there is a lot of work to make this real – participation with organizations such as the Sierra Club may help – but won’t be easily accomplished.
 - c) Community: We need to partner with the County Board in providing social services to our whole community; for example, “cooling centers” that attract Arlingtonians that need respite from summer heat and reduce our community’s overall energy consumption. Providing EV charging stations at our schools should also be accomplished in coordination with Arlington County’s efforts.
 - d) Responsibility: In all of our decision making we must be transparent, responsive, and accountable. Also, we need to create a culture within APS that embraces the responsibility for our actions related to our environmental impacts.
 - e) Leadership: Arlington has a reputation for leadership in many regards. We need to continue to build that reputation by adopting forward looking policies, and actually following through with commitments and actions. An essential component of making that happen is effective communication with broader community about what we are doing and why – an “up and out” activity that school board members are uniquely positioned to do. I fully accept this responsibility, and my experience both APS advisory committees (especially leadership of the Advisory Council on Instruction), and my professional experience with the MODIS Science Team, have prepared me to do this.
 - f) My personal experience – fifty years of wilderness camping: Environmental impacts of climate change are not only “science” in my experience and the experience of my family. Almost every year for the past fifty years I have camped in the wilderness (in all four seasons) especially in Killarney Provincial Park, Ontario. My son, Eduardo, and my daughter, Camila, started at ages five and four. Our favorite campsite is on Nellie Lake (see: mikemonaghan.ca/?page_id=97 Mike is a friend of mine – we met in Killarney, have been on camping trips together – I told him where to go to take that picture). Camila graduated from W&M as an ecologist and now is a NPS bio tech. Eduardo and I were on Nellie Lake last June – we were forced to leave after four days because of the smoke from the fires in Quebec and nearby Ontario. The Air Quality Index (1 – Best, 10 – Worst) was 10+. I *feel* the tragedy – and I know that this is not the worst.