

*Preserve the Valley Candidate Questionnaire Responses from*  
**Ward Council Candidates:**

**NANCY L. HOLLAND (WARD 1 incumbent)**

**Question #1: How do you propose to increase citizen engagement in government decision-making?**

Citizen engagement increases when information is timely relayed to the community, and adequate opportunity is provided for consideration, dialogue and feedback. I will continue providing regular, monthly Ward meetings; consistent information reporting through the “Nancy Holland, Ward 1” Facebook page; and by serving as a responsive, accessible representative, who listens, advocates, solves problems, and who stays abreast of issues affecting all residents. Special meetings and town hall forums, like those I have produced and co-hosted with City Administration officials, Utility Representatives, and with my Ward 8 Council colleague, as well as my continuous push for better City use of technology to reach and inform busy residents, can all assist the goal of engagement, too. Informed citizens are empowered citizens; and we all deserve easy access to answers, and resources. And when citizens stake their time, talent and energy in City taskforce and grassroots advocacy work, the product of that work should receive real hearing and consideration, for implementation. As a City, I believe we should specifically expand the longtime view of “adequate [legal/formal] notice,” in the announcement of land use and development plans, to recognize our demonstrated interest, as a community, in how our City takes shape- and to acknowledge that development affects more than just immediate, nearby property owners. Similarly, “opening up,” and demystifying the process by which the City’s Administration initiates major spending, development/redevelopment and policy change is an idea whose time has come: when people are “invited to the table,” democracy happens! The Valley Master Planning process was a fresh approach for the City of Akron, and a good example of such open engagement. It was community prompted, participatory- and the process inspired my primary sponsorship (with Councilman Malik) of the unanimously-passed City Council Resolution declaring Akron a Gateway Community to the Cuyahoga Valley National Park. And on every core issue, ranging from development and land use, to public safety, to housing, to economic growth, to environmental stewardship and sustainability, recent experience makes clear that more public process, and more opportunities to bring the values, interests and expertise of the community into the room, means more opportunity for wise, sustainable decision making, and consensus building

**Question #2: What steps do you believe should be taken to balance development with the protection of natural resources and the environment?**

“Mindful” development ideally balances the “needed” or desired use with the real impact upon the people, places and values of the community. Right now, one of our greatest threats to public health- and human survival- is climate change, and the issues of environmental and spatial justice are also of critical concern in modern, forward-looking cities. It is not only possible, but crucial, to address the real need for rapid reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, by incentivizing or requiring that new construction meet current green building standards. Additionally, the preservation of viable buildings; the reduction of operational emissions by the use of renewable energy in new and renewed buildings; and the use of building products and construction methods designed to reduce embodied emissions are all reasonable standards for public development projects, particularly. Occupying, maintaining, renewing, and adapting existing buildings is the greenest approach, and is a proven tool for meeting emissions reduction targets. It is also an affordable, ideal approach for a post-industrial City, with a significant inventory of vacant buildings. Heightened public notice, for the proposed sale/development of all City-owned land should also be part of a “mindful development” approach, that values citizen engagement. Easy-to-find City website notices, and visible on-site postings, identifying all land available for sale, timely announcing all land sales, and providing adequate time and meaningful opportunity for public comment, prior to completion of the transaction, should also be implemented.

**Question #3: Would you amend the current 15 year property tax abatement program to incentivize redevelopment in the urban core and remove incentives to greenspace development? Yes**

**Question #4: Do you support 100% conservation for the 45 acres of Theiss Woods? Yes**

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**JUDE YOVICHIN (WARD 1)**

**Question #1: How do you propose to increase citizen engagement in government decision-making?**

Step one to increasing/improving citizen involvement in government decision-making takes meeting people face-to-face. Relationships between neighbors creates community. I strongly believe a councilman must be a part of that community in order to represent them. For the past 6 months I have been going door-to-door meeting the people of Akron and it has been both wonderful and instructional. I hope to bring what I have learned from simple conversations with my neighbors in Ward 1 to City Hall. Beyond the campaign trail, I encourage concerned citizens to attend council meetings and make their voices heard. In school, my class and I went in front of City Council to propose a holiday recognizing Akron's indigenous community and it remains to this day. If we go to each other, councilmen to their constituents and citizens to city hall, we can raise up Akron together.

**Question #2: What steps do you believe should be taken to balance development with the protection of natural resources and the environment?**

Akron has been blessed by abundant natural resources and parks. I grew up hiking and exploring the Metro Parks and National Park and ran all around them during cross country season in high school. As such, the parks and their conservation hold a special place in my heart. Development has been made in the valleys and areas around the parks and we welcome the people who live there to the City of Akron. However, moving forward I propose that development be focused on the areas of Akron that are already open to us. As I walk the streets of Ward 1, I see dozens of empty lots waiting to be developed. No trees to knock down! All over Akron is room for development without targeting the parks we grew up in and our children play in. In conclusion, I support development, but not in our parks.

**Question #3: Would you amend the current 15 year property tax abatement program to incentivize redevelopment in the urban core and remove incentives to greenspace development? Yes**

**Question #4: Do you support 100% conservation for the 45 acres of Theiss Woods? Yes**

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**JAMES HARDY (WARD 8)**

**Question #1: How do you propose to increase citizen engagement in government decision-making?**

Co-governance between residents and local governments is the future of American democracy. Multiple pathways exist for Akron to increase citizen engagement in decision-making. Two that I hope to lift up, if elected to Akron City Council, are participatory budgeting and comprehensive planning.

As Chief of Staff and Deputy Mayor for the City of Akron, I created the Akron Parks Challenge - the city's first participatory budgeting program. The Challenge makes available \$100,000 for neighborhood residents and organizations to decide for themselves how to improve their neighborhood park. To date, nine city parks have been designed and improved by and for the residents they serve, leveraging city money to attract other private philanthropic capital that wouldn't have been available otherwise. This program led us to seed fund the Akron Parks Collaborative (APC) - a private non-profit organization working to engage the community around the creation and sustainability of vibrant public spaces within the city. APC now stewards local "Friends of..." groups, while supporting citizens in advocating for Akron's park system. As Ward 8 councilman, I will advocate for more opportunities to engage residents in budgeting decisions, expanding opportunities for meaningful input.

Additionally, the City of Akron has not conducted a true comprehensive land-use plan since 1989. Such plans offer vital opportunities to engage neighborhoods block-by-block on development aspirations before any private developer is in the picture. It is long past time we conducted a process such as this. During my time at City Hall, I learned the hard way how a lack of a citywide plan breeds distrust and poor decision-making. I pledge to take these learnings to Akron City Council, and work collaboratively to fully fund an open, transparent citywide land-use planning process.

**Question #2: What steps do you believe should be taken to balance development with the protection of natural resources and the environment?**

One of the things I've learned in my current role with the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, helping cities like Akron across the country think about more equitable economic and community development practices, is that the dominant paradigm for development is broken – not just in our region, but all over the U.S. Cities our size, in particular, face enormous pressure to show "success" under the traditional measures of development. Namely population growth, job growth, and capital investment. While no one would question the need for good jobs with living wages and supportive benefits in Akron, we need to reimagine how we achieve such a goal.

The first step we should take to better balance development with the protection of natural resources is to engage residents in authoring a new five-year plan for the Office of Integrated Development (OID). In 2019, after two years of planning and study, the city of Akron launched this office, which I led as Deputy Mayor. As OID's first leader and champion, I am extremely proud of the inaugural five-year strategic plan we put in place. Bringing together economic development, community development, recreation and parks, downtown operations, and elements of engineering, OID was and is a completely new way of structuring development at the city level. OID committed itself to co-creating with residents a city that is healthy, equitable, beautiful, and resilient. It set forth clear goals and objectives, including the need for a citywide comprehensive land-use plan, that for the first time measured more than traditional growth metrics. The City of Cleveland has now adopted the OID model, and other communities are looking at it, as well. We have the opportunity now to build on successes and work with residents to map out a plan for the next decade.

Second, I pledge to introduce legislation authorizing a conservation easement program within my first year on Akron City Council. The City of Akron owns more than 18,000 acres of the Cuyahoga River watershed in Portage and Geauga Counties, bought decades ago to protect our drinking water. As Chief of Staff and Deputy Mayor, I commissioned Western Reserve Land Conservancy to conduct a feasibility study on a conservation easement program to permanently protect these lands from development. That study showed the city of Akron could raise tens of millions of dollars in revenue while protecting our drinking water forever. This presents a generational opportunity for Akron to protect natural resources.

Citizen engagement on an initiative such as this is vital, particularly when deciding how to best utilize the money raised by an easement program. Again, this is where strong participatory budgeting practices can ensure Akron residents have a meaningful voice in the decision-making

process.

**Question #3: Would you amend the current 15 year property tax abatement program to incentivize redevelopment in the urban core and remove incentives to greenspace development? Yes**

**Question #4: Do you support 100% conservation for the 45 acres of Theiss Woods? Yes**

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### **SAGE LEWIS (WARD 8)**

**Question #1: How do you propose to increase citizen engagement in government decision-making?**

Akron politics has become insulated and exclusionary of most people. Whenever possible they hide their actions and refuse to be transparent.

An initiative I'm very interested in pursuing if I become the next Ward 8 city council person is a Ward 8 Community Alliance. I have a vision of going block by block creating micro-community Block Clubs that meet for many things like community garage sales, neighborhood cleanups, and general get togethers. But the larger goal is community involvement. If we can organize one block and another block then we can organize 2 blocks with 2 more blocks. This grassroots organizing is an ideal project at the Ward level. Organized people become powerful people.

I'm extremely excited about helping Ward 8 residents get excited about local politics and initiatives. They are already a very well educated and thoughtful group. I think this kind of organizing is perfect for a ward like Ward 8.

**Question #2: What steps do you believe should be taken to balance development with the protection of natural resources and the environment?**

Akron has lost 100,000 people since 1960. And the numbers are still going down. There is absolutely no reason we need to develop any more land in our city. In fact, I believe green spaces could be a major contributor to enticing people from other parts of the country to live here. Akron has a very bad habit of just doing what every other city is doing. We have to resist that. Each city is unique. We must celebrate our differences. Having green spaces located near the largest bodies of freshwater on the planet will probably be a huge selling point in the very near future.

**Question #3: Would you amend the current 15 year property tax abatement program to incentivize redevelopment in the urban core and remove incentives to greenspace development?**

Yes,

**Question #4: Do you support 100% conservation for the 45 acres of Theiss Woods?**

Yes

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**SUSAN CULVER (WARD 9)**

**Question #1: How do you propose to increase citizen engagement in government decision-making?**

To increase citizen engagement in government decision-making, we must consider community-based responses. Why pay consultants thousands of dollars when the citizens, whom it impacts the most, can share their input and experiences? For this feedback to be effective, the citizens must be given the same information, data, reports, etc., as the government.

**Question #2: What steps do you believe should be taken to balance development with the protection of natural resources and the environment?**

To balance development that protects natural resources, we should incentivize the restoration of existing homes instead of deforesting. Agencies like Summit County Land Bank are beneficial for helping urban property owners expand their green space while eliminating abandoned and blighted properties. Increasing access to towpaths from existing neighborhoods would add value.

**Question #3: Would you amend the current 15 year property tax abatement program to incentivize redevelopment in the urban core and remove incentives to greenspace development? Yes**

**Question #4: Do you support 100% conservation for the 45 acres of Theiss Woods? Yes**

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**MICAH TOWNSEND (WARD 9)**

**Question #1: How do you propose to increase citizen engagement in government decision-making?**

I would propose more open meetings and town halls and more utilization of modern media to connect to those unaware of events to make them aware.

**Question #2: What steps do you believe should be taken to balance development with the protection of natural resources and the environment?**

We should offer more incentives to redevelop previously developed areas and re use properties that are falling apart and offer tax incentives to use them. We need to secure more environmental areas to avoid urban sprawl and reclaim areas such as golf courses and land not being developed on.

**Question #3: Would you amend the current 15 year property tax abatement program to incentivize redevelopment in the urban core and remove incentives to greenspace development?**

No

**Question #4: Do you support 100% conservation for the 45 acres of Theiss Woods?**

Yes