

Question 1: Downers Grove is named after a group of trees.

What would you do to increase our tree canopy?

CANDIDATE: Bob Barnett for Mayor

In addition to the Village's long-standing record of increasing our tree canopy over the years, I think a next-step target would be to map out all the possible locations for trees. Currently, we have our trees mapped and we replace them as necessary and add additional trees as requested. However, if we set a goal of having a tree in all the possible public locations, we would surely have a net-positive effect on the canopy when added to our ongoing efforts.

In the past, I've proposed additional developer fees to be pooled and used as incentives/assistance to those seeking to add new trees on private property. While this hasn't gotten traction in the past, I still believe it's a good idea and I'll again bring it to the new Council and will also include it as part of our GRC discussions set for later this year. As you probably know, removing trees - think: diseased or damaged - is expensive and often homeowners find they're unable to follow up those costs with the cost of replacement trees. I think we can and should be able to stimulate planting of additional private property trees. One of the serious challenges with private tree ordinances is that they focus on removal and often, the development that might remove them, still causes the trees to suffer/die if the owner chooses to "work around" the existing trees to avoid running afoul of such an ordinance. Any efforts at additional ordinance need to be thoughtful and effective - not just words to say we "did something".

CANDIDATE: Marshall Schmitt for Mayor

I would take four steps to increase the tree canopy: (1) increase the rate at which the Village plants new trees; (2) introduce an initiative to create incentives for residents and requirements for developers to preserve and restore trees that are removed; (3) as part of (2) create a fund, like the stormwater fund, dedicated to growing the tree population in the Village through replanting, relocation, and disease prevention; and (4) seek to pass a tree ordinance that provides appropriate penalties for the destruction of trees over a certain circumference.

Question 2: The Village Council recently discussed joining the Greenest Region Compact.

Would you support Downers Grove joining the Greenest Region Compact, and if so, what should we do to implement it?

[note: since the questions went out, the Council has voted to join the Compact.]

CANDIDATE: Bob Barnett for Mayor

As you may know, we joined the GRC at this week's Council meeting by a unanimous vote of the current Village Council! Implementation of the GRC Framework is a subject which we've also committed to, planning to take it up during this year's Long-Range Planning efforts.

Our 2021-2023 Long-Range Plan built on the existing Village priority of "Steward of Environmental Sustainability" and added "Environmental sustainability refers to the Village's responsibility to deliver its services in a way that protects or enhances natural resources. The Village seizes opportunities to 'green' its operations, when possible, whether by seeking grants to introduce new environmentally friendly practices or by seeking the most environmentally friendly option for existing services". I'm proud of this added focus and the GRC report makes clear that we're doing a lot of really good work as it relates to our shared environment.

Based on the report linked below, I have no doubt the next Council will find significant opportunities to expand on our leading record of environmental accomplishments and, that we'll remain committed to our long-standing Village priority of Environmental Stewardship. There is significant support within the Council to consider creating a Village Sustainability Plan and I look forward to leading the Village Council in those considerations, expanding on the good work we've been doing since I joined the Council in 2009.

CANDIDATE: Marshall Schmitt for Mayor

I fully support becoming part of the Compact and implementing it by creating and enacting a comprehensive sustainability plan consistent with the best practices followed by members of the Compact.

Question 3: The Environmental Concerns Commission has been dormant since 2020.

Should Downers Grove revive this commission and what should its role be in guiding village actions and policy?

CANDIDATE: Bob Barnett for Mayor

The ECC has been a valuable asset to the Village Council in its role as a recommending body. As with other petition-driven Boards and Commissions, they remain a valuable asset and will no doubt be engaged again to offer additional input to the Village on environmental issues.

CANDIDATE: Marshall Schmitt for Mayor

The Village should immediately restore the Commission. It should report monthly to the Council and consider whether the Village should hire a Sustainability Coordinator, whose mission would be to coordinate all environmental and sustainability work within the Village. Further, the Commission should evaluate and makes recommendations regarding any project within the Village that has an impact on environmental and sustainability issues in the Village. Finally, the Commission should consider proactively and make appropriate recommendations to the Council regarding any initiatives that the Commission believes would improve the environment within the Village or would advance sustainability within the Village.

Question 1: Downers Grove is named after a group of trees.
What would you do to increase our tree canopy?

CANDIDATE: Mike Davenport for Commissioner

In addition to supporting current initiatives for our public spaces, I would support incentives to encourage tree preservation and new tree plantings on private land. A reduction in building permit fees in exchange for preserving significant trees or planting new ones is one example. And since we know trees are excellent at absorbing water, perhaps we should encourage planting new trees in lieu of, or in addition to, installing the underground stormwater detention required for new homes and large additions. I believe initiatives like these that encourage rather than prohibit will be most effective. If we re-engage our Environmental Concerns Commission to explore this issue, I'm certain we can come up with more ideas.

Finally, we need to re-examine our codes and ordinances. For instance, the amount of off-street parking required and building coverage allowed certainly play a role in determining how many trees might be removed for a site's development. Tree preservation was not a major factor in determining these standards, but we now know very well that they should have been.

CANDIDATE: Jim Devitt for Commissioner

To increase our tree canopy, I would make sure that every time a tree is taken down on public land, AT LEAST another one is planted. On private property, I would like to see a village program where we use our credit rating and buying power to purchase native species at a discounted rate and offer them to residents at a discounted rate. I would work with the Morton Arboretum staff to come up with suggestions and recommendations on how we can increase our tree cover. Even more importantly, I would make sure we KEEP GREEN SPACE GREEN and allow room for trees to grow. I think what happened at Longfellow School should NOT have happened, those were over 100 year old oak trees and they should have stayed. Ironically, the village has "tree protection area" signs and fencing around small recently planted trees at the same location. I would also do more to educate the public about caring for trees in our area, such as proper mulching around them as well as watering.

CANDIDATE: Denise McCann for Commissioner

Two options to maintain and increase our canopy. One public: urge, incentivize private property owners to retain, maintain and plant new growth. One commercial: pass an ordinance holding developers accountable to retain (when possible), plant new growth, replace what was torn down to build.

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CANDIDATE: Mike Davenport for Commissioner

Yes, I support adding Downers Grove to the list of 144 other Chicagoland communities that have joined the compact, with the ultimate goal of achieving a participation level '3B'. Further, the council should be focused on the long term environmental and financial benefits for our community, not just the expected budgetary costs. This is about investing in our future. I truly believe there's a cost benefit to our residents for doing the right thing for our environment.

CANDIDATE: Jim Devitt for Commissioner

Joining the Compact would be a wonderful thing, as it provides direction and a framework to sustainability as well as examples to follow. It also allows us to join with other communities in collaborative efforts to help us achieve our goals.

CANDIDATE: Denise McCann for Commissioner

I am ABSOLUTELY in favor of Downers Grove joining the GRC at the highest level (3b). I served on the Environmental Committee before it was disbanded. I think that with the new Civic Center we have taken a number of actions to head us in the right direction, especially with the stormwater mitigation, reduced water use and renewable energy component.

Question 3: The Environmental Concerns Commission has been dormant since 2020.
Should Downers Grove revive this commission and what should its role be in guiding village actions and policy?

CANDIDATE: Mike Davenport for Commissioner

Yes, the ECC should be re-energized. It must be if we are serious about joining the Greenest Region Compact. We need the ECC as a resource to inform us about the environmental benefits and costs of all decisions.

CANDIDATE: Jim Devitt for Commissioner

The Environmental Concerns Committee SHOULD be revived, as more and more issues within our community are popping up all the time. For example, they could assist with work on stormwater and flooding issues, as more eyes on the issue mean more ideas to help us all. They could assist with making sure green spaces within the village stay that way, as well as making sure that ordinances are followed regarding environmental concerns.

CANDIDATE: Denise McCann for Commissioner

ABSOLUTELY X's 100 %

Question 1: Downers Grove is named after a group of trees.
What would you do to increase our tree canopy?

CANDIDATE: Leslie Sadowski-Fugitt for Commissioner

I support a private tree ordinance, which Commissioner Kulovany and I brought forward twice before, but unfortunately has not had the support of 4 Council members. This ordinance would require any landowner to submit a tree survey done by a certified arborist when altering any property in order to minimize tree loss. The expectation is that the petitioner will adjust their plans as necessary to save the maximum number of trees, and if larger caliper trees would need to come down, then they would either replant a certain number of trees based on the maturity of the tree taken down, or pay into a fund for the Village to replant trees when we are in a planting cycle. It puts into practice that we prioritize trees and they are of value to our community.

CANDIDATE: Tammy Sarver for Commissioner

Everything possible! I am a vegan, an animal lover, and a supporter of anything that makes our environment better. In order to do so, we need to make sure that we are using best practices in our efforts, especially if we are planting trees in places in where there is development. Making sure that trees have adequate space between them so that they can thrive and investing in porous surfaces (like cobblestone strips) between trees so they can get the right amount of water are important considerations. Spending time and resources on consulting with experts about how to best go about creating a thriving tree canopy is important to informed decision making.

CANDIDATE: Martin Tully for Commissioner

First, because most of the trees and cultivatable land in our community are in private hands, I would encourage the Village to incentivize private property owners not only to protect and preserve existing trees but also plant to new ones. This can be done in a number of potential ways, such as (i) giving tax credits to property owners for planting and maintaining desirable species of trees (e.g. oaks); (ii) requiring more significant replacements for trees that are removed due to re-development, or requiring a greater fee-in-lieu of for tree removal; and (iii) stepping up enforcement and fines for failure to follow tree protection requirements.

In this regard, the community itself should be inspired and empowered to expand our tree canopy, as that can have a tremendous impact. For example, since my wife and I re-developed our current property over ten years ago, we have planted over sixty (60) trees on our property alone. Several of those trees are now young, maturing oaks. We must educate and encourage other residents to similarly plant such hearty trees, instead of only fast-growing trees that may provide immediate gratification but do less for the long-term success of our tree canopy.

Second, while the Village plants many trees every year, it is not just about numbers. Quality, species, location, and maintenance are also critical. If elected, I would encourage the Council and Village staff to step up efforts to lead by example and expand the tree canopy in our community. This would include more robust collaboration with the Suburban Tree Consortium, the Morton Arboretum, and the Conservation Foundation. Our local not-for-profits can play a role here, too. For example, the Friends of the Edwards House, the Pierce Downer Heritage Alliance, and the Organic Gardeners Club are collaborating on a Founder's Day speaker this year from the Morton Arboretum that will help educate the community on the importance -- and challenges to -- oak trees in our community.

Third, as someone who was very involved with crafting and passing the Village's initial historic preservation ordinance, some initiatives can be ahead of their time. Only later does the community appreciate the wisdom and embrace the initiative. Voluntary landmarking of historic places in our community started slowly but then -- through advocacy, education, and celebration -- took off and became very successful with over 30 landmarked properties to date. The initiative of a private tree protection ordinance has been raised several times over the past two decades in Downers Grove but was ahead of its time. I would support revisiting that initiative now to gauge the community's perspective on and support for some type of ordinance that would strike an appropriate balance between tree protection and private property rights, similar to what was achieved with voluntary historic landmarking.

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CANDIDATE: Leslie Sadowski-Fugitt for Commissioner

I support joining the GRC (in fact, I submitted the new business item), and I believe that we should follow the 3b path. This would involve developing a Sustainability Plan, hiring staff and/or consultants in order to have experts on this issue within the Village (as we currently do not have someone whose expertise is environmental sustainability), and we should bring the Environmental Concerns Commission out of its dormancy to participate in that deliberation process.

CANDIDATE: Tammy Sarver for Commissioner

Yes, I support Downers Grove joining the Greenest Region Compact. I support Option 3B.

CANDIDATE: Martin Tully for Commissioner

Yes. GRC participation is a "no brainer" for Downers Grove and should be diligently pursued. It is yet another benefit of our Village's membership and participation in the DuPage Mayors and Managers Conference (of which I am a past president).

I was very pleased that the Village scored so highly when compared to the GRC goals. It is a testament to the fact that the Village has long sought out opportunities on its own to be a greener and more environmentally friendly community. In terms of the Village's level of participation in GRC, I would like to see more data regarding the nature and extent of the additional investment, what other GRC communities are experiencing and accomplishing, and then have a dialogue with our community to assess their input and perspectives. I would hope that we would bring everyone with us in support of this very worthwhile venture.

Question 3: The Environmental Concerns Commission has been dormant since 2020.

Should Downers Grove revive this commission and what should its role be in guiding village actions and policy?

CANDIDATE: Leslie Sadowski-Fugitt for Commissioner

I believe that the Environmental Concerns Commission should be revived. They should have two roles, as originally designed. The first is to research topics that are given to them by the Village Council. One great use for them would be enacting a Village-wide Sustainability Plan, as mentioned above. The second is to have regular meetings highlighting efforts around the Village and neighboring communities to identify gaps on an annual basis where the Village could and should be doing more. I know that as we analyzed the Village's work when researching the GRC, we were very light in communications, policy, and climate efforts. I would like to use the expertise we have in this community to provide for a sustainable Village for generations to come.

CANDIDATE: Tammy Sarver for Commissioner

Yes, this Commission should be revived. Looking back at the old meeting minutes (archived online) I am impressed by the work that had been done by the ECC when it was active, and excited about the proposals and ideas left unexplored or unfulfilled since the ECC has lay dormant. That said, the ECC should serve as an advisory body to the Village Board as it would have the time, expertise, and enthusiasm to research those important issues affecting our environment. I know that Warrenville follows a similar model with great success, and a colleague of mine (who has also been appointed to the EPA's Children's Health Protection Advisory Committee) serves on their Environmental Advisory Commission. She has agreed to come and speak to our Board about their successes, especially in regard to single-use plastics and the spraying of dangerous pesticides and herbicides.

CANDIDATE: Martin Tully for Commissioner

Candidly, the ECC should never have gone dormant in the first place. There are many regularly occurring issues where the Village could greatly benefit from the ECC members' input, expertise, and experience. In my waning days as mayor in 2019, I tried to reinvigorate the ECC with new purpose and mission, so I am disappointed that other priorities presumably took precedence.

The ECC stands in the role of every other board and commission within the Village organization. They provide advice and counsel on issues either brought to their attention by Village staff or specifically referred to them by the Village Council. The ECC is not a statutory, petition-based board or commission, like our land use boards. However, I think that both Village Staff and the Village Council should tap the ECC's expertise and perspectives more frequently. As a councilmember, I would encourage the Village staff and council to do so.