

Conservation Questionnaire for Wake Forest Municipal Election 2025

The Wake Forest Conservation Alliance ("Alliance") is a Section 501(c)(4) nonprofit organization whose members are interested in promoting policies that support adequate consideration of environmental concerns in decisions by the Wake Forest Board of Commissioners ("Commissioners") so that current and future generations of Wake Forest residents can enjoy our natural environment. We recognize that North Carolina is a Modified Dillon Rule state, which effectively sets some limits on the power and authority of the Town of Wake Forest, such that the Commissioners may not be able to implement fully policies recommended by the Alliance. Similarly, the Alliance recognizes that there are competing interests that must be considered and there are limits to the amount of funding that can be devoted to conservation and environmental projects or extracted from developers.

With this background, we are sending each candidate this questionnaire to learn their positions on important conservation and environmental issues. We will post responses on the Internet. We hope this effort on our part will help each of you communicate your views on conservation and environmental issues to the voting public.

1. Do you believe the Unified Development Ordinance ("UDO") adequately addresses key measures such as connecting and preserving green spaces, reducing pollution, protecting water resources, and initiatives like "dark skies"?

Response:

The UDO lays out some good protections, but I believe we can do more to make sure Wake Forest grows in a way that stays connected to nature. When we plan well, nature gives back to us. I especially support "dark skies" efforts — reducing unnecessary outdoor lighting so we can see the stars again, save energy, and protect wildlife. Take fireflies, for example. Many of us remember them lighting up our yards as kids, but their populations are declining. One reason is light pollution: their glow signals (used to find mates) are drowned out by bright lights. Pesticide use, habitat loss, and poor water quality also play a role.

The UDO provides a strong foundation, but it should continue evolving to go further in protecting what makes Wake Forest special. Preserving and connecting green spaces doesn't just help nature — it raises property values, reduces flooding, attracts businesses, and gives neighbors a place to gather and recharge.

At a recent Town Hall, I learned from the Wake Forest Conservation Alliance about the concept of "forest bathing" — the idea that simply being in nature can reduce stress, improve health, and help us feel more connected. That resonated deeply with me, because our wellness is tied directly to the health of our environment.

In short, the UDO shouldn't just manage growth — it should actively guide us toward a healthier, more connected Wake Forest where nature, people, and wildlife thrive together.

2. What steps can the Town take to encourage developers to avoid clear-cutting and to prioritize tree and wildlife habitat preservation?

Response:

My goal is for Wake Forest to be a town where every developer knows from the start: tree preservation and wildlife protection are community priorities, not afterthoughts.

That starts with communication. I would work with groups like the Wake Forest Conservation Alliance, town staff, and conservation specialists to bring science-based guidance into conversations with developers early in the process. Consistent dialogue helps everyone understand what works, what doesn't, and how projects can balance growth with preservation.

We can also use incentives and recognition — highlighting developers who design projects that save mature trees, protect wildlife corridors, and reduce environmental impacts. This not only benefits nature but also builds goodwill with residents.

The Town's role is to set a consistent expectation: if you want to build in Wake Forest, you are expected to be a partner in protecting our natural character.

3. Given the importance of the Neuse River basin for many reasons, including protection of drinking water, how can the Town better protect lands that buffer streams of all categories, most especially those connected to, or a part of, the Smith Creek area around the Reservoir?

Response:

Protecting the Neuse River Basin — especially the Smith Creek area around the Reservoir — must be a priority for Wake Forest. Healthy stream buffers are nature's filtration system: they reduce flooding, improve water quality, and safeguard our drinking supply.

This issue is personal for me. While earning my Master of Public Administration in Wilmington, I saw firsthand what happens when water protections fail. New Hanover County faced chemical contamination (GenX), and residents were told to filter their drinking water — even pets were advised not to drink from the tap. In graduate school, we role-played as decision-makers responding to that crisis. That experience taught me how high the stakes are when protections aren't strong enough, and I don't want to see Wake Forest in that position.

As Commissioner, I would advocate and build partnerships with conservation groups, scientists, state agencies, and developers to ensure that preserving buffer lands is treated as a public health priority. Safe drinking water is not optional — it's a basic human right.

When we put ecosystems and long-term health above short-term profits, everyone benefits — families, wildlife, and our community's future.

4. How can Wake Forest effectively and efficiently work with Raleigh, Rolesville, and Franklin County to protect watersheds and green corridors that do not stop at municipal borders?

Response:

Watersheds and green corridors don't stop at town borders, which is why Wake Forest must work hand-in-hand with Raleigh, Rolesville, and Franklin County. Collaboration and communication are key. By partnering with neighboring municipalities and conservation groups, we can combine resources and expertise in ways no single town could do alone.

It's also important to ensure scientists and specialists are at the table, because their knowledge helps us design solutions that actually work on the ground. From a community perspective,

collaboration creates economies of scale — meaning we can share data, stretch resources further, and amplify results.

When developers see that Wake Forest and our neighbors are united on conservation, it sends a clear message: this entire region is invested in protecting trees, green space, and watersheds. That consistency builds healthier, more resilient communities across the region.

5. Can rezoning and other land use approvals be conditioned on developers using stormwater management practices beyond pipes and ponds, such as rain gardens, bioswales, and permeable pavement?

Response:

Yes. Rezoning and other approvals can and should be conditioned on better stormwater management practices. As a Commissioner, I would work to make sure developers know this is a priority in Wake Forest. That means setting clear expectations during rezoning conversations, updating ordinances where possible, and leaning on the expertise of scientists and conservation groups to identify what works best.

6. How can we grow in a way that adds affordable housing choices while still protecting green space?

Response:

Affordable housing and green space can go hand in hand. For example, mixed-income developments that include parks, community gardens, or shared natural spaces give residents healthier places to live while still meeting housing needs. Preserving tree canopy and connecting green corridors can also make new neighborhoods more attractive, reduce heat, and lower utility costs — which supports affordability in the long run.

As a Commissioner, I would lean on the Affordable Housing Plan's guidance while also working with local developers and conservation groups to prioritize both housing access and environmental stewardship. By combining data, expertise, and smart planning, we can grow in a way that keeps Wake Forest livable, equitable, and connected to nature.

7. Would you support policies that make it easier to redevelop underused sites in already developed areas instead of clearing forests on the edge of town?

Response:

Yes — I support policies that make it easier to redevelop underused sites in already developed areas rather than clearing forests on the edge of town. Redevelopment just makes sense: it protects trees and green space, uses existing infrastructure, and strengthens our economy by reinvesting in neighborhoods.

We've already seen opportunities here. The SunTrust site downtown, for example, could become a vibrant mixed-use property that adds housing and businesses while preserving the local charm that makes downtown special. Projects like this also show redevelopment can respect our community's character by matching the look and feel of surrounding buildings.

Redevelopment is both environmentally and economically smarter than expanding further outward. It also creates opportunities to work closely with current property owners who want to partner with the Town.

For me, it's about being proactive: keeping Wake Forest's natural character intact while guiding growth toward places that strengthen our community's heart.