

# BAILIWICK NEWS

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## Candidate responses to Sierra Club questions

By Katherine Watt

*Last week, I received a mailed questionnaire from the Sierra Club, asking for my views as a Borough Council candidate, on environmental issues. Below is a reprint of the responses I submitted.*

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to Sierra Club questions about environmental issues.

Please note, these are my current positions and I'm open to changing my mind if presented with credible new data and sound arguments.

## General information about my worldview, goals

I view environmental issues from a different perspective than most mainstream environmental organizations such as Sierra Club, ClearWater Conservancy and Nittany Valley Environmental Coalition.

I think the global economy, and each local economy within it, is tightly linked to fossil fuel use. I find charts showing the coupling of economic growth (as measured by GDP) with annual growth in energy consumption extremely compelling, especially when viewed alongside charts showing the exponential growth in debt since the early 1970s, when conventional oil production in the lower-48 peaked (1970), and when Nixon took the dollar off the gold standard (1971).

I agree with Sierra Club that climate disruption is and will continue to hit the Centre Region with changes in precipitation, flooding, heat waves, pollinator (i.e. bee colony collapse) and related suffering for people, ecosystems and crop production, and that efforts to adapt to the disruption and protect ourselves from further disruption are worthwhile.

But I also believe that the ongoing collapse of the global financial system already hits, and will continue to hit local communities through economic effects much more directly painful than climate disruption.

The primary challenge, as I see it, is about how the people of State College the Centre Region, and the surrounding rural townships, will cope when fossil fuels and products made and distributed with fossil fuels become involuntarily unaffordable to more and more people with each passing year.

So my goals are less about how the government of State College should act and spend taxpayer dollars directly on environmental projects. My goals are more about how the local government can decentralize power

(reduce the power of profit-driven corporations like Penn State and governmental corporations like township governments and the regional Council of Governments) to make it easier for individuals, families, small business owners and farmers, to rebuild old ways to meet basic needs from local resources and labor, rather than from lengthy, fossil-fuel-driven national and international supply chains.

To sum up: I'm concerned about both economic system collapse and ecosystem collapse, but in my work, I'm focused on supporting community creation of ecologically-resilient alternative economic systems at the local level: individuals, households, neighborhoods.

I'm also concerned about the collapsing legitimacy of public institutions such as governments, large corporate universities and mass media corporations. None of those institutions have served the interests of the general population for a very long time, and I think we're approaching a tipping point as public understanding of those betrayals becomes widespread.

I believe that legitimate government is derived from the consent of the governed and is limited in its power to protecting individual civil liberties and natural human rights, as laid out in the 1776 Pennsylvania Constitution and the U.S. Constitution.

I believe the principles of citizen consent and limits on government power have been undermined from very early in American history, by the wealthy, investor class for personal enrichment and empowerment, through costs imposed on the working class.

From that perspective, I believe individuals are currently over-regulated, so I will work for deregulation of individual liberties.

I'm particularly interested in clearing the way for Borough property owners to replace built environments (structures and paving) with gardens, urban farms, pollinator meadows, and woodlots for local food production, carbon sequestration and production of wood for small-scale furniture and paper manufacturing.

However, I think the extralegal bestowal of human rights and civil liberties – including property rights – on commercial and municipal corporations violates the principles of citizen consent and limits on government power.

I believe the current state of affairs is a corrosive perversion of our founding revolutionary ideals that blocks communities of free human individuals from protecting and stewarding the air, water, soils and ecosystems that sustain our lives. Permanent corporations are structurally sociopathic: immortal and

without human conscience or compassion, built solely to maximize profit and market share.

I believe that corporate personhood is legally reversible by local government action to strip corporations of the powers they currently enjoy and abuse, because all political power is inherent in *human* people, not in the state and federal legislators and judges who have constructed the legal fiction that corporations are people too.

I'd be delighted to be a part of a local government engaged in that process of empowering individual humans and disempowering corporations.

If elected, I also would advocate for a transition from the current method of local election of volunteer legislators every four years as controlled by the state legislature and courts, and legislator appointment of semi-permanent paid local administrators, to sortition for both: local government policy and administration by random lottery among all registered voters (similar to jury duty) for two-year terms for all positions.

**1) State College Municipality (Borough) passed a resolution in June to commit to a strategy that will require the use of 100% renewables for fuel and heat sources by 2050. This resolution should be implemented in several phases and will reduce our greenhouse gas emissions to net zero by 2050 while promoting permanent jobs and a better quality of life.**

**1a) What would you promote as an outline of your strategy to achieve these goals by 2050?**

**1b) What would you do as an elected member of Borough Council to support the switch to 100% renewable energy and net zero greenhouse gas emissions in the short term by 2030?**

I think that resolutions like the June 2019 renewables resolution are symbolic, not substantive. Government actions are substantive if they identify specific public infrastructure to be built, maintained, retrofitted, or demolished, and if the proposals are accompanied with clear budgeting of public funds and an analysis of financial, ecological and moral/ethical costs and benefits.

If elected to Borough Council, I will generally vote against symbolic resolutions. I think they distract lawmakers from proposing, debating and voting on substantive measures.

If elected to Borough Council, I will, however, make and support specific, substantive measures to reduce or eliminate the fossil-fuel energy use and scope of Borough government departments, programs and facilities that lie outside the original purpose of American governments: to protect individual lives, civil liberties and the private

property on which human people and families live and work. (More on this above).

For example, I would support revoking the State College Borough Council's endorsement of the Centre Region Council of Governments "order" for the 100-acre Whitehall Road Regional Park.

If the land hasn't already been bulldozed, it's productive, permeable soils that require no Borough funding for maintenance labor or supplies; it's rented to local farmers for crop production.

If built, the park will destroy these agricultural soils, add to an already financially burdensome regional park portfolio; commit Borough taxpayers to long-term debt to finance initial construction; require new taxpayer-funded annual allocations for maintenance labor and supplies, including fossil fuels; use additional electricity, water, sewer and other utilities; and draw new users and vehicular traffic and emissions to the area.

**2) Sierra Club volunteers have been enthusiastically and effectively working on plastic bans for straws and bags. Many Centre County restaurants have pledged to remove plastic straws from their operations. Significant discussion surrounds methods to discourage the use of plastic bags.**

**What is your process to incentivize the removal of plastic bags from State College Borough businesses and further reduce the use of plastic straws?**

I think it's great if restaurant owners stop giving out straws and rely on customers knowing how to drink out of glasses and eat milkshakes with spoons.

I think it's great if store owners promote and provide reusable bags and boxes, and get their customers to participate through positive feedback (small discounts or prize drawings such as Trader Joe's) or negative feedback (charging customers for plastic or paper bags).

But I don't support the plastic bag ban campaign to the extent it's an unfunded mandate on private citizens as business owners and customers.

I would like to see Sierra Club encouraged or start a cottage industry making, marketing and selling reusable bags from raw materials recycled or produced locally. For example, feed bags made of sturdy, woven polypropylene are sold at Tractor Supply and Wiscoy. After use, they generally enter the regional waste stream as trash. But with human planning and labor, they could be collected and up-cycled into reusable grocery bags. Local hemp cultivation is another possibility, to produce fiber for bag manufacturing.

But I think efforts to ban or charge shoppers for plastic single-use shopping bags alienates working class citizens who have difficulty affording groceries to begin with, and who are or could be employed in regional plastics manufacturing jobs, which are being created in

response to a glut of natural gas due to hydraulic fracturing in natural gas extraction.

I think those jobs will disappear within a few decades (or sooner) because the depletion rate for fracked gas wells is extremely steep and the fracking corporations are losing money on the operations, funding them from new infusions of investor cash, not from sales.

But in the meantime, for those citizens, their own family's immediate economic survival is and should be a higher priority than plastics in waterways and soils worldwide.

If elected to Borough Council, the plastic bag ban will not be a priority project for me. But I will work on other economic and ecological goals related to local zoning and land use, lifting the many regulatory barriers that prevent people from starting sustainable small businesses in their homes and neighborhoods that meet local needs with local resources and local labor.

**3) Renewable energy will include significantly increased use of solar and wind power for electricity generation. Sierra Club supports not only individual solar generation, but also the use of distributed generation by communities, such as the solar parking lot in Penns Valley at Burkholder's Market. Additionally, community-based solar programs allow for citizen participation in electricity generation by subsidizing solar installations on community public buildings such as the State College Borough Municipal building, the hospital, schools and fire station.**

**What methods would you support for electricity generation within the community of State College Borough?**

I support individual household and business solar projects, funded up-front or with low interest loans up to \$50,000.

I also support the formation of time-limited public corporations by individual investors voluntarily pooling private funds to build community-level facilities either on private land or on public buildings (schools etc. as listed in the question).

But I only support those projects if those projects are fully self-funded pre-construction (involve no loans or other forms of debt).

I will only support the formation of corporations that will legally dissolve as soon as the project is built, with fair legal contracts in place for the distribution and cost of the energy produced thereafter.

I don't support major, permanent energy, financial/banking or municipal corporations controlling the financing, development and operation of community-scale renewable energy infrastructure.

**4) Centre County, as well as State College Borough, are plagued by air pollution from many types of mobile sources, including agricultural, construction and on-road vehicles. Large local events, such as Arts Festival, graduations and football games, also contribute to the problem. CATA uses CNG (compressed natural gas) engines, but these fossil fuel sources need to be replaced to meet our 100% renewables fuels goal for State College Borough.**

I agree that major tourism and land development (horizontal sprawl into undeveloped fields and forests) in the Centre Region contributes to transport-related pollution, and would add that the steady stream of large delivery trucks bringing food and manufactured supplies from outside the region to the big-box stores are another source of air pollution.

I also believe the two gas-fired power plants on Penn State's campus and the proliferation of private, corporate-owned high-rise luxury student dormitories downtown also need serious public attention to their contribution to local air quality problems. For example, The Standard is a 165' highrise being built right across the street from the fossil-fuel fired West Campus Penn State power plant, which has 99' emissions stacks. Once built, the highrise will – under prevailing winds - push "hot spots" of combustion pollutants back down onto the people who live and work on campus and downtown.

I support the planned, phased decommissioning of tertiary paved streets and driveways in the Borough, to be replaced with native plants and trees.

I support a reduction in Penn State enrollment, a ban on further campus expansion, reduction in football games and major arena concerts (number of events per year and number of tickets sold per game) and a cancellation of the Beaver Stadium expansion project.

I support closing the University Park Airport, and working to rebuild passenger rail connections from State College to Harrisburg, Pittsburgh, Altoona and Ithaca.

I oppose the new push by the Central PA Convention and Visitors Bureau to market the Centre Region for more tourism and convention business, because if successful, it will bring more vehicular traffic, and more hotel construction with related emissions to a population already burdened by the administrative costs of traffic control, police, fire and emergency medical services for existing large-scale events.

I support the protection of fields and forests through limiting construction activity to renovation or replacement of existing building stock only, at existing population densities and use intensities, and denying Borough Council approval (within the Borough and regionally through COG) of new roads, parking lots and parking decks, housing developments, corporate business developments and shopping centers.

For example, Penn State is currently pitching a proposal to Borough Council, seeking municipal approval of a new \$50-\$60 million West Campus parking deck for about 1,600 personal vehicles.

Penn State has been closing down parking lots on campus, to use the space for new construction of new buildings.

This is another in a long list of examples of burden shifting and externalization of costs by corporate Penn State, onto the citizens who live in State College. Closing parking lots on campus reduces vehicular traffic, pollution emissions and pedestrian danger on campus, by moving those dangers to the outskirts of campus, putting the traffic, pedestrian safety and air quality burdens on the surrounding residential and commercial neighborhoods.

In general, adding infrastructure that supports private vehicle use encourages private vehicle use. To discourage it, we need to reduce the available infrastructure and increase infrastructure for buses, trolleys, and other public transit.

We also need to increase the ability of individuals and families to start small businesses in urban and suburban residential neighborhoods, offering essential goods and services such as grocery stores, hardware stores and medical and dental offices within walking and bicycling distance of where people live.

I think Borough Council should deny Penn State's parking deck plan, and use its power to pressure Penn State to invest that \$50 to \$60 million in planning and constructing new local public transit networks, such as electric buses for CATA and trolley lines extending outward from a hub in downtown State College.

I'm also opposed to the high-speed interchange proposal for I-99 and I-80. Again, investing public dollars in infrastructure that supports private vehicular traffic increases that traffic. To decrease traffic, we need to stop investing in expansion of private automobile infrastructure and invest instead in local and regional public transit.

**4a. As a member of Borough Council, would you actively encourage CATA to move to phase out CNG buses and buy new electric buses?**

Yes.

**4b. To that end, would you as a member of Borough Council actively encourage CATA to apply for PA's share of the VW settlement monies that allow the procurement of electric buses?**

Yes.

**4c. Would you support the increased bicycle use in the Borough? How would you encourage decreasing the usage of cars?**

I would support increased bicycle and pedestrian transportation in the Borough by decommissioning tertiary paved roads to make them unsuitable for vehicular traffic except for occasional, emergency use, and plan to only maintain narrow paved paths for bicycles and pedestrians in the public right-of-way.

I would also support planning and construction of new local public transit networks, such as trolley lines extending outward from a hub in downtown State College.

I support taxation of Penn State real estate to raise funds for public transit, and also to facilitate establishment of small, locally-owned, businesses throughout urban, suburban and rural neighborhoods.

I would work to amend zoning and public health ordinances to encourage any of these essential uses (shops and small restaurants, greengrocers, bakeries, delis, cafes, butchers, cheese shops, fishmongers, canneries, small farms and orchards, food processing businesses, small medical clinics, hardware stores, small/low-power manufacturing facilities) in any residential, commercial and industrial neighborhood in the borough, to bring people, the goods and services they need, and their jobs, closer together in neighborhoods where people live, reducing the current need for vehicles to obtain food, other household supplies and professional services which are now concentrated in corporate big-box stores and office buildings with enormous parking lots at the outskirts of town, along major roadways.

The only restriction on repurposing homes and other residential structures for small business purposes that I would support, would be restrictions requiring that the building footprint, height, and water/sewer/trash burden not increase from current levels, with some exceptions, for example, for food processing businesses that would use more water than a typical household.

**5. What are the biggest environmental problems in the Borough and what will you do to address those problems?**

The biggest environmental problems in the Borough are preemptive state planning, zoning and public health laws that promote speculative land development and block small business development at the expense of people and our ecosystems.

Corporations have captured state and local legislatures through those laws, and use municipal solicitors, township managers, and state and county judges to coerce elected legislators into enforcing corporate will at the expense of local citizen self-governance.

To address those problems, I would talk about them openly in public meetings, and refuse to cast votes consenting to the usurpation of local self-governing power.

I would also encourage others interested in stopping corporate abuse of people and ecosystems, to run for office, so we can build local legislative majorities to preempt the state and federal preemptions and restore self-governing power at the local level.

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