



Go Green Wilmette
Answers to the Questionnaire for Candidates Running for
Trustee, Wilmette District #39 Board of Education

April 4, 2017 Municipal Election

Note: There are four candidates running for three open positions

YOUR ENVIRONMENTAL BACKGROUND AND PRIORITIES

1. Please briefly describe any environmental accomplishments or projects in which you have been involved, either professionally or personally.

Jonathan Cesaretti: I do not have notable accomplishments in this area.

Lisa Schneider-Fabes: I have more than three decades of experience working on environmental issues. I graduated from Chicago-Kent College of Law with an Environmental Law Certificate and have continually used my knowledge and deep interest in environmental issues in both a professional and personal capacity.

As an employee, I:

- Served in the United States Peace Corps as an Agroforestry Extensionist and organized community groups to promote alternative agricultural techniques;
- Worked as an Environmental Protection Specialist for the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and monitored and assisted local governments and HUD clients in complying with environmental laws;

- Managed the Chicago Housing Authority's Environmental Unit, responsible for protecting residents from urban environmental hazards.

As a consultant, I:

- Helped implement the Chicago Climate Action Plan by managing several key initiatives and strategies;
- Co-developed and managed the Environmental Action Network, a cohort of community groups that learned how to integrate energy conservation and climate action issues into their core programming.

As a District 39 volunteer, I:

- Served as Environmental Awareness Chair for Highcrest Middle School, focusing on reducing food waste
- Advised Go Green Wilmette during the development of their District 39 advocacy strategy

Mark Steen: I have supported many environmental projects for decades – I will mention a small sample.

Recently I helped my Fortune 500 client to enter into a multi-decade contract to replace fossil sources with solar energy for some of its U.S. factories' energy needs. Additionally, I helped the client evaluate options for developing a technology to scrub CO₂ from the atmosphere.

As a school board member, I have successfully advocated for several projects to improve environmental awareness and impact, including perhaps the District's most significant sustainability decision in recent years: the creation of a position for a dedicated Sustainability Coordinator.

I have also supported more traditional efforts. For instance, during my tenure, the District has implemented composting at every school building and, according to a recent garbage audit, reduced landfill contribution by 33%.

Ellen Sternweiler: I opened Bellybum® Boutique in 2008—a local, green-parenting store dedicated to offering environmentally conscious, responsibly manufactured merchandise and to encouraging healthy lifestyle choices. Products included the largest selection of cloth diapers, trainers and diapering accessories in Chicagoland, as well as breastfeeding supplies, organic toys and baby gear, and all natural bath and body products.

Bellybum® was an accessible, nurturing and supportive educational setting that effectively communicated—to a broad audience—that change does not have to be an all or nothing proposition but there are 'shades of green.' Through collaborations with local professionals and

businesses, I offered classes on a myriad of environmental topics and successfully engaged customers; inspiring many to embrace doing “just one thing” to effect positive changes for our planet.

I became involved in seeking improved regulations governing the manufacture of children’s products. I supported and promoted reform of the “Toxic Substances Control Act,” and published an op-ed in 2013 entitled, “Small Businesses Support Regulations to Protect Children From Toxic Chemicals,” on behalf of the American Sustainable Business Council. The Act was amended in 2016 by “The Frank R. Lautenberg Chemical Safety for the 21st Century Act,” and I’m proud to have played my small part in the evolution of this positive change.

As a parent, I continue to do what I can to heal our planet by participating in school projects such as the transplanting of trees, flowers and shrubs from the front of Romona School last spring in anticipation of the school’s new construction.

Gail Szulc: As Principal of Oriole Park School, I wrote a proposal, which was funded, to develop and maintain a natural Illinois prairie on 6000 square feet of our school property. All classes K-8 participated in the planning and resulting curriculum for the next 8 years. The students also participated in recycling efforts of cans, (collected and brought from home), paper and bottles. Yearly trips were scheduled to the recycling plant for each class.

As president of the Garden Club, I initiated the process of rain barrel acquisition from the village for all members, and neighbors. As programming chair, I recruited monthly speakers on environmental issues on topics such as greener lawn care and protecting bees from pesticides among other things.

I was actively involved in the planning for the construction of the Lift Station at 815 Harms Road to alleviate flooding in east Glenview. I have volunteered in the Harms Woods forest preserve providing hands on efforts to remove invasive species.

I have provided the necessary requirements to qualify and be certified as having a back yard wild-life refuge.

2. If elected, are you planning to introduce any new initiatives that would address environmental issues? What would you do to involve members of the community?

Jonathan Cesaretti: I understand by working with my own children the current D39 environmental sustainability project is comprehensive and well thought-out.

I believe the following initiatives are worth further evaluation by the District:

- (1) Prioritize initiatives that would promote and enhance student health and safety. For example, I would like to see regular testing (and remediation) of water and air quality for pollutants/impurities.

- (2) Urge the District to work with its suppliers to ensure it is doing what it can to promote the consumption of goods based on “green” or “sustainable” chemistry over traditional practices. As example, a continual re-evaluation and potential elimination the use of toxic chemicals and traditional plastics.
- (3) Incorporate reuse and recycling concepts and designs in all new building or rehabilitation projects undertaken by the District.

I would encourage community input and collaboration with other instruments of local government (City, Library, etc.) with respect to identifying and prioritizing any given environmental initiative.

I would seek advice from interested community members with respect to my own priorities and theirs.

Lisa Schneider-Fabes: I applaud District 39’s efforts to increase its sustainability practices and environmental literacy education. Between the recent sustainability audit, the Ingersoll-Rand Feasibility Study and the Sustainability Planning and Practices section of the District’s strategic plan, the District has a road map for increasing its environmental and sustainability focus in the classroom and throughout the District.

As a Board member, I will not come into the job with an agenda or list of new environmental initiatives. Rather, I will hold the administration accountable for its Sustainability Planning and Practices outcomes and action steps listed in the District 39 Strategic Plan and ensure that innovative environmental and sustainability goals and action steps are included in subsequent plans. I also will listen to what the community finds of interest and work with the Board to determine the economic and logistical feasibility of new ideas that arise.

Community engagement is critical to designing and rolling out any new initiative. I will make myself available to the community and seek their input in and out of the boardroom. The level of community engagement would depend on the project, but could range from public meetings to the creation of joint working groups.

Mark Steen: If re-elected, I will continue to ensure that the District embraces sustainability while delivering on its fundamental mission of education.

I believe it is important to move from thinking of environmental improvements as coming from specific projects to habitually including environmental impact in any relevant decision. As an example, when the District began to buy iPads, the Board encouraged the District to identify cost savings from less sustainable resources, such as textbooks or photocopying, and to investigate re-selling our iPads at the end of our use. Both of these ideas help the finances of the district *and* reduce the environmental footprint of the program. Neither would be considered a “sustainability” project per se, but they demonstrate the importance of moving from “sustainability initiatives” to a “sustainability mindset.”

Of course, it is also important to have some projects which have environmental improvement as a primary goal. For these initiatives, as with any school board initiative, I work with interested

members of the community because ultimately my job as school board member is to represent the community. As an example, I worked with members of Go Green when they approached me about increasing the District's commitment to sustainability. A direct outcome from that interaction was the inclusion of environmental sustainability in the District's strategic plan.

Ellen Sternweiler: As a Board Member, I'd seek to further collaborate with Go Green Wilmette, other local businesses and organizations to research and explore the implementation of new and innovative environmental technologies, social action projects and initiatives. I'd focus on projects geared towards achieving multiple objectives such as maximizing energy efficiency, improving indoor environmental and water quality, and material conservation. While continuing to support our community's dedication to improving environmental sustainability is crucial, I believe we can accomplish those goals while also beautifying our schools, providing additional educational and action opportunities for students and community members, and potentially saving the District money.

Some ideas I would explore are:

- As buildings require repair, healthier and environmentally conscious construction options such as non-toxic interior finishes; Low-E windows made with Low-E glass which allow light to pass through while blocking heat from outside - improving HVAC efficiency and lowering energy consumption; and the use of recyclable or renewable materials.
- Green roofs, which could not only beautify dated buildings but have been shown to prolong the service life of heating, ventilation, and air conditioning systems through decreased use. Additionally, green roofs could save the district money as they naturally reduce the energy required to heat and cool buildings.
- Involving students, community members and local businesses in the design and planting of native plant rain gardens at each of our schools. Native plants require little or no irrigation to maintain and benefits include pollution control, flooding protection and water conservation.
- Explore environmentally conscious, social action projects such as reducing D39 food waste by donating unused food to local food pantries.

Gail Szulc: I would propose consideration of the EEI, a free K-12 curriculum that teaches critical skills in science and history-social science using environmental topics such as water and energy, the air they breathe, the water they drink and the food they eat. The content supports Next Generation

SUSTAINABILITY PRACTICES AND EDUCATION

3. In 2016, District 39 added environmental sustainability to its strategic plan. What expectations would you set for staff, to incorporate sustainability into its operations or curriculum, in order to make the schools more sustainable, save the district money, and model the importance and implementation of sustainability to the students?

Jonathan Cesaretti: Based on my understanding of the current curriculum, the District has made substantial strides in incorporating sustainability into its operations and curriculum. I would encourage the administration and teachers to refine and improve these initiatives on a continual basis.

Lisa Schneider-Fabes: My expectation for staff is that they would complete the action steps listed in the Sustainability Planning and Practices section of the Strategic Plan. In addition, I would expect that the District track the outcomes identified in the Plan and report on those outcomes on a quarterly or bi-annual basis. Finally, I would encourage the District to continuously research best practices related to sustainability and seek outside expertise, as needed, to provide District 39 personnel with the support they need to make schools more sustainable and to educate the community about the importance of doing so.

Mark Steen: In voting to add sustainability to the District's strategic plan, I hoped to help infuse the mindset of sustainability throughout the members of the school community. The school board sets policy for the system, but is not deeply involved in day-to-day operations. Our teachers, students, and staff, who are in our schools every day, often generate the best ideas for improvements. With sustainability in the strategic plan, I expect all members of the school community to identify and put into action practices, small and large, that improve sustainability.

I am happy to report an example of this behavior. At a recent Board meeting we met representatives of Highcrest's new Green Team, which has helped to eliminate plastic straws from Highcrest Middle School's cafeteria, among other accomplishments. With the teacher advisor at their side, students explained what they had done and some facts about their accomplishment (the U.S. uses enough plastic straws to fill Yankee Stadium more than nine times each year). These kinds of initiatives combine curriculum with operations in ways that I think are both memorable and empowering, and involve teachers, students and staff. They represent exactly my expectations for adding sustainability to the strategic plan.

Ellen Sternweiler: The Sustainability Audit completed last year provided an excellent roadmap of areas we can continue to improve. While the efforts of the Sustainability Committee have been remarkable in moving D39 towards environmental sustainability, they can't accomplish this task without the support of our staff and a curriculum that gives substance to those actions. I would look forward to working with the Sustainability Committee to encourage improved teacher/student collaborations and enhanced curriculum integration.

In each of the ideas proposed above, there are a multitude of opportunities for teacher/student collaborations from education, design, planting and maintenance to social action projects. By integrating our curriculum with these plans we can achieve both our sustainability and

educational goals. It's also notable that while some of these initiatives require little or no additional spending to administer, others offer budgetary benefits beyond their initial implementation costs and could, therefore, save the District money over time.

As a District that prides itself on the excellence of our education system, we must take a role as leaders in this area. We need to set an example for other districts. To achieve this goal, each initiative must be employed as a valuable opportunity to teach and engage our students in meaningful ways so they not only gain experience but also the understanding that will enable them to become effective stewards of our planet.

Gail Szulc: Reiterate the theme "reuse, recycle, reduce,"... which is already supported by the "green teams" who made a very interesting presentation at the Feb 27th District 39 Board meeting. Continue to use classroom activities on a weekly basis, and provide recognition to individuals and classes that reported increased success in any of these areas.

The district has a number of programs already in place in the cafeterias using compostable food boats, re-useable water cups, soup bowls and silverware. These programs should be continued and expanded.

I would advocate extended use of the school gardens as outdoor classrooms, and ensure coordination of the activities of all six buildings.

4. Would you consider supporting or enabling a community solar project on top of a District 39 structure, that would save the district money over time, contribute to climate change solutions, and model these solutions for students? Why or why not?

Jonathan Cesaretti: I would support such an initiative.

I am interested in exploring opportunities for our District to (1) lead the nation by example; and, (2) provide an educational opportunity to the students and the larger community about solar energy, the cost efficiencies it provides, and the outcomes of reducing our reliance on fossil fuels.

Lisa Schneider-Fabes: Yes, I would support a community solar project on District 39 buildings under the assumptions (including financial sustainability) listed. A small solar panel is already installed at Highcrest Middle School. However, it is old and outdated. I recommend adding a solar installation at Wilmette Junior High, which is already included in the list of capital projects to be funded in the District's Strategic Facilities List. This installation would serve as a pilot for the rest of the District.

Mark Steen: I would be happy to have a community solar panel project on the district's structures, assuming that it did not interfere with the district's primary goal of educating students in a financially responsible manner. The school buildings are a community resource paid for with

taxes, and as a Board member I have tried to ensure that the community has reasonable access to the buildings consistent with the District's primary mission. If the tax-paying community wants to use a school structure for a solar project that does not detract from the safe and economically efficient education of our students, I would support such a project.

Ellen Sternweiler: It would be prudent, given recent declines in the installation prices of solar panels, along with increasing electricity costs, to consider the implementation of a community solar energy project atop one of our schools. Not only does a project such as this fit within our sustainability plan, it would provide financial and educational benefits beyond its environmental impact.

That said, we would need to conduct a cost/benefit analysis to responsibly budget and prioritize for a project such as this within the larger framework of our District's improvements and initiatives wish list. If we find it's within our District's means, and proves to be a viable priority, I would absolutely support considering its implementation.

Gail Szulc: I would support installation of solar projects on top of all District 39 buildings as funding permits. Such installation would create a new income stream, generate clean energy, export power to the grid and then send that power on to homes, save on carbon emissions, and provide opportunities for children to learn how energy works.

5. How could District 39 help teachers increase their expertise and comfort level teaching about environmental topics, including the use of the District's seven school gardens?

Jonathan Cesaretti: I would encourage and support the District to study similar initiatives in public education and collaborate (either formally or informally) with peer institutions from around the world on ideas and practices around environmental topics, including the District's gardens.

Lisa Schneider-Fabes: In its strategic plan, District 39 has committed to creating environmental literacy indicators, developing rubrics, establishing baseline data and promoting school gardens. Also, District 39 committed to identify curricular connections for environmental literacy and sustainability. I support these commitments, as they will provide teachers with direction on the District's expectations around learning outcomes in this area. The District must also provide on-going professional development and resources to support teachers as they increase their focus on incorporating environmental literacy and the use of the outdoor classrooms in their practice.

Mark Steen: District 39 uses a number of methods to increase its teachers' expertise and comfort level with any topic. Based on the work that my three D39 children have done and shared with me, I am impressed with our teachers' awareness of environmental issues. I also believe that as our new Sustainability Coordinator role becomes more mature, teachers will gain an important aid in identifying resources and crafting lesson plans that address environmental topics, including through the use of our gardens. In fact, District support for using the gardens was an explicit consideration in the decision to create the Coordinator role.

Ellen Sternweiler: I believe in collaboration and we are fortunate that our community is not only rich in natural resources but local, green businesses and individuals dedicated to fostering an appreciation and care for the environment. If elected, I would continue to foster D39s relationships with Go Green Wilmette and the Area Schools Environmental Awareness Group (ASEAG), to provide increased educational opportunities to our teaching staff.

I would also pursue new partnerships with organizations such as the Center for Neighborhood Technology (CNT), local green houses and independent professionals to educate on a broader range of topics and technological advances. By expanding our educators' knowledge base, we provide them with the better tools for engaging students.

Most importantly, I would encourage the enhanced use of our District's seven school gardens, as well as our local parks, as they are incredible learning resources.

Gail Szulc: Teachers can access many in-school activities online that could be integrated into the curriculum. Local garden clubs could participate and staff development time could be allocated for discussion and planning. Also, awards and ceremonies could be given to classes and individuals with outstanding participation.