



## **Go Green Wilmette**

### **Answers to the Questionnaire for Candidates Running for Trustee or President, Wilmette Village Board**

**April 4, 2017 Municipal Election**

**Please note: Bob Bielinski is running for a second term as President of the Village Board. He is uncontested and will go on to serve in this role. He has graciously answered the questions as a way of letting Wilmette residents know the views of the person who will represent them in this role for the next four years. His replies are at the end of the list of candidates. [There are four candidates running for three positions.](#)**

#### **YOUR ENVIRONMENTAL BACKGROUND AND PRIORITIES**

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

**Kathy Dodd:** I was and am a supporter of the Elmwood Dunes Preserve, which was a local grass roots initiative to recapture and restore nearly an acre of beach property at Elmwood Avenue. I am also a block captain for a neighborhood initiative to restore Forest Avenue to its original brick surface. To accelerate funding for this initiative, we are looking at a Great Lakes Protection Fund Grant, which would include converting our parkways to greenspaces with planted depressions allowing rainwater runoff from impervious areas so water is better absorbed.

**Joel Kurzman:** Allison and I are avid gardeners. One of the hardest parts about moving was leaving our rain garden, two rain barrels, and native landscaping. Two years into our current home, Allison is doing great flower gardening in the front, and I have thoroughly re-landscaped the back with native plants. I make several birding trips per year, including the Christmas Bird Count, and always bring my binoculars on day hikes. I love camping with my children; it's car camping at this point, but I hope we will evolve into backpacking. I believe appreciation for the outdoors is a gateway to being environmentally conscious, in addition to mindful practices at home.

**Stephen M. Leonard:** Several years ago, I developed a shopping center project in the southwest suburbs where we worked with the Army Corps of Engineers to redevelop an environmentally sensitive area to responsibly allow for the maintenance of water flow through the site while ensuring the health of native plant materials and other plantings. The Army Corps portion of the project was completed successfully, at great cost to the development team. However, once complete we were very proud that the outflowing water was actually cleaner than the water entering the property, and native plantings were more bountiful than before we disturbed the site.

Also, in lieu of a ten acre field of asphalt, we added numerous bioswales to the mix. This was a very expensive design component, however, the environmental impact was worth it.

**Reinhold Schneider:** I have served for 25 years on the Board of the Community Investment Corp. (CIC) whose primary role is to finance the rehab of affordable rental housing in the at-risk Chicago neighborhood. Over 40,000 housing units have been preserved rather than demolished. To preserve existing housing stock makes a lot of sense both economically and environmentally.

I was also very much involved in updating Wilmette's Comprehensive Plan (1998-2002). While we made reference to water and energy conservation; facilitating bike usage; and parkway tree planting, I don't think we treated the subject as thoroughly as we should have.

**Bob Bielinski:** During my tenure on the Village Board, the Village's environmental accomplishments include:

Coal Tar Sealant Ban. On February 28, 2017, the Village Board voted unanimously to prohibit the sale and use of coal tar sealants in Wilmette. After being approached by concerned citizens, I led the Village through a review and approval process which included a comprehensive report from the Environmental and Energy Commission to help inform the Board's view on the topic.

Elmwood Dunes Preserve. Through public-private partnerships and significant community involvement, a beautiful nature preserve along the lakefront was created. I supported restoration of the dunes for the quiet enjoyment of our residents thereby striking a balance with concerns of neighboring property owners.

Winnetka Stormwater Plan. The Village carefully monitored Winnetka's proposed plan to redirect stormwater into Lake Michigan to ensure that it did not threaten the health and safety of Wilmette's residents. The Village Staff and I met with Winnetka's Village President, Village Manager and Engineering personnel to discuss their now abandoned plan.

Transit Oriented Development. The Village Center Master Plan encourages mixed-use, transit oriented development in downtown Wilmette, and a luxury apartment and retail development is now under construction at the long-vacant Ford site near the Metra station. The project is exactly the type of development envisioned by the Master Plan.

West Park Sanitary Sewer Storage Project. The \$18 million project was constructed under West Park to limit the frequency and severity of basement backups during major storm events for homes located west of Romona Road. The Village needs to continue to invest in its sanitary sewer infrastructure to ensure that it does not deteriorate and threaten the environment.

**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?**

**Kathy Dodd:** If elected, I will work with the community to ensure that we keep moving towards a greener community, balanced with prudent implementation and costs. The largest current “green” initiative is the potential storm water project for west Wilmette. I’m looking forward to seeing the results of the second engineering study which is currently in progress. This is an issue that needs to be addressed.

Also, I’d like to explore ways to modify the salt we use on our roads during snow and ice storms to a more environmentally safe product. The village has already identified new solutions that will reduce environmental impacts. I’d like to work to move this initiative forward.

**Joel Kurzman:** Two of the four planks of my Stewardship campaign directly address environmental issues. Both will need vocal support from the community so that, if elected, I am not a minority voice.

First, I believe all children in Wilmette should be able to walk or bike to school safely. The school walking routes (and the Village resources deployed to implement) have not been adjusted for many years, despite significant demographic changes. With tricky intersections and occasionally lax enforcement, too often we hear of children and seniors being hit by cars. I have begun to work with the Civics and Safety Committee, which includes participants from the Wilmette Police Department, all the local schools, and Wilmette Citizens for Active Transportation (WCAT). I need people’s help to amplify my voice at Village Hall as an advocate for improved pedestrian and bicycling safety.

Second, my Stewardship campaign introduces a new paradigm to the flooding issue. We have a massive misalignment between development and infrastructure west of Ridge Road. Yet we continue to pave over every remaining open space, not allowing for rain to be absorbed naturally into the ground. The misalignment is so great that, although the MWRD Watershed Management Ordinance will incrementally help, it does not address decades of development without linked infrastructure upgrades. I am calling for no significant new development west of Ridge Road until our Village has clarity about the current proposal to ensure 10-year flood protection for all of Wilmette. I need people’s support for curbing significant new development. I also need people’s vocal engagement that appointees to the Zoning Board and Planning Commission should have expertise on storm water management.

**Stephen M. Leonard:** One of my personal environmental struggles has always been the lack of recycling opportunities for normal non-rechargeable batteries. Although I know it is possible to recycle these batteries, most recycling centers only permit rechargeables. I need to better understand why this is the case, but my goal would be to require any retailer that sells batteries to also accept recycling of those same batteries.

I completely understand this is not just as easy as the stroke of a pen. There needs to be facilities in place and an infrastructure available to complete the cycle. However, this will never happen without a push.

**Reinhold Schneider:** We need to reduce impervious surface area to reduce run off into our sanitary and storm sewers. We need to find effective alternatives to our current impervious driveways and patios to encourage their use via the zoning code. Better enforcement of shutting off downspouts from sewers would help.

Rain gardens would also help to slow run-off from entering the sewer system.

Note: None of this would solve our flooding problem, but it would help.

**Bob Bielinski:** The Village has limited resources and significant capital needs, but the Village will continue to implement cost-effective and sensible practices that help the environment as it fulfills its primary mission of providing essential municipal services to residents and business owners.

Members of our community are currently very involved in the public discourse on environmental issues in the Village, and the recent enactment of a coal tar ban in the Village is an excellent example of community engagement on an issue which led to action by the Village Board.

## **CLEAN ENERGY**

**3. Would you consider supporting or enabling a community solar project on top of a village structure, to save the village money over time, contribute to climate change solutions, and support Illinois' growing clean energy economy? Why or why not?**

**Kathy Dodd:** The village can be a leader in clean energy but, realistically, most of our progress will likely occur with new construction. The recent renovation to the public works yard is LEED certified and as we look to replace the police station I'm hopeful we can incorporate green building techniques and clean energy. As with all things the village does, we can and should be leaders and set the example; at the same time, we should balance this desire with being responsible stewards of the tax payers' money. We should seek out funding available to municipalities who are looking to lead in this area (such as the example cited in Q1).

**Joel Kurzman:** Yes. However, I would need to know how long it would take to actualize savings from any given project before supporting it. There are some super long-term propositions that

might be hard to justify. I am going through the same process as a homeowner. With a possible new roof in my near future, I am evaluating the potential for solar panels.

**Stephen M. Leonard:** Absolutely. Given our mixed climate, I would need to understand how the economics of this installation would eventually save money, but with that knowledge, I would strongly favor the project. Given budgetary constraints, we may need to rally the community to assist with the project privately. Maybe there could be sponsorship opportunities to help defray the costs. I am a big fan of bringing the private sector into investments like this to build pride in the Village and in this case, our environmental stewardship. Who knows, if private citizens get involved and see the wisdom in this investment, they may want to consider the same for their own private residence.

**Reinhold Schneider**

I would support any alternative to fossil fuels that is economically viable over time (including solar, geowells etc.) for municipal, commercial, and residential structures.

**Bob Bielinski:** The Village's budgetary challenge will continue to be balancing limited resources and other competing priorities (including increasing pension obligations) with our most basic infrastructure needs, primarily roads and sewers.

However, if a community solar project would generate annual energy cost savings in excess of the cost of repaying the principal and interest due on bonds issued to finance the project, then the Village should certainly explore investing in this type of project.

**4. What initiatives would you like to see the Village take to improve community-wide energy efficiency and energy conservation?**

**Kathy Dodd:** We can and should lead, but as we should also listen to what our residents want; as we have varying and diverse perspectives, needs, and priorities across the community. As a village, we have banned gas-powered leaf-blowers and will soon prohibit coal tar driveway sealants (a proposal I support). These are positive steps and we need to continue to look for innovative ways to work together.

**Joel Kurzman:** I welcome ideas and perspective from the GGW community. This is admittedly not an area of expertise for me.

**Stephen M. Leonard:** I have seen many buses and other heavy equipment in the City of Chicago running on alternative fuels such as propane and electricity. Could we convert some of our fleet and equipment to alternative fuels over time? That would be a great service to the community and once again, inspire others to potentially invest in electric cars for their own purposes.

**Reinhold Schneider:** I would offer energy audits to help folks save energy in a cost effective way.

**Bob Bielinski:** The Village should continue to promote environmental awareness and education programs by building upon its existing partnerships with groups like Clean Air Counts and Go Green Wilmette. The Village itself has undertaken many energy saving initiatives over the years including installing high efficiency street lighting; adding low-E glass, energy saving lighting and motion sensors to public buildings; purchasing energy efficient equipment; and investing in pumps with higher efficiency motors at the Water Plant.

**5. In addition to, or instead of, the above answers, what role do you think local governments should play in addressing the problem of climate change?**

**Kathy Dodd:** Climate change is a highly charged topic. Regardless of where one stands, the village can and should do its part to be good stewards of the environment. Clean vehicles, responsible vegetation management, and water conservation are important regardless of anyone's position on global warming. I think it is important to be responsible and prudent users of our resources. While there are things we can do locally, I also believe State and National governments can and should help lead us.

**Joel Kurzman:** I will be open-minded to any proposal that gives the Village a reasonable chance to be a better Steward of the environment and to model best practices.

**Stephen M. Leonard:** In addition to the above, I think education could go a long way. I know many people refer to climate change as a theory or may think it is a tool of the opposition to somehow deceive the public for their private gain. If we could help educate the community as to the true, indisputable science of the issue, it may be very helpful. Science, not politics!

**Bob Bielinski:** Climate issues are global issues and therefore lend themselves best to policymaking at the national and international level, but the Village has long utilized environmentally conscious and sustainable practices that improve air quality and the environment.

For example, the Village began using biodiesel fuel for all diesel vehicles in 2006, installed (with grant funding) diesel oxidation catalysts on nine heavy trucks, adopted a no-idling policy, and added two hybrid light duty trucks. The Village received the Platinum award from Clean Air Counts in 2007 for air quality initiatives.

## STORMWATER MANAGEMENT

### 6. What do you see as the best green infrastructure practices for reducing flooding within the village?

**Kathy Dodd:** Green infrastructure has a role, but it cannot be the only way to solve flooding issues. The village has tested green alleys with great success. And we have planted rain gardens in many cul-de-sacs in the community to reduce flooding. As mentioned earlier, we are looking at using a similar concept in parkways to alleviate flooding issues. But no amount of green infrastructure will alleviate our flooding issues in a 50 or 100-year rain.

**Joel Kurzman:** Please see my LOWV questionnaire for all my formal storm water proposals. As for best green practices, I wish to focus on curtailing new development, adding permeable pavers, and creating a storm water utility.

Permeable pavers can reduce flooding in our community by incrementally turning back the misalignment between development and infrastructure. I propose the Village enter into direct negotiations with the Top 10-20 properties contributing the most storm water run-off to our sewer systems. It's likely many of these properties will include parking lots. The collaboration should entail projecting timelines for re-surfacing and negotiating potential cost-sharing for the difference between regular paving and permeable pavers.

How would we know the largest contributors of run-off to the sewer systems? Many municipalities have implemented storm water utilities, which determine fees based on impermeable surface. By doing so, we would finally cease billing for sewers based on water usage. Currently, a resident who uses water, say, to care for native landscaping pays a larger sewer bill than a resident who paves over their property and, therefore, contributes more run-off.

**Stephen M. Leonard:** Permeable surfaces! Although many factors have contributed to our problem, converting farmland to hard surfaces is high on the list. It would be so helpful if we required future development, both residential and commercial, to utilize permeable pavers in their driveways and parking lots. If we lowered density, fewer homes could be built on each acre of land, and less conversion to hardscape improvements would be accomplished. Clearly this is a long term play considering our circumstances, but if we don't get started, it will never happen.

**Reinhold Schneider:** As referred to in Question 2, owners can reduce impervious surface coverage (driveways, parking lots) and create rain gardens and swales. This will not solve the problem, but it will help. A more significant, but still only partial solution, is to increase storm sewer capacity.

**Bob Bielinski:** Green infrastructure plays an important role in stormwater management, especially when dealing with localized flooding issues in specific neighborhoods. With the support of grant funds, the Village is currently testing the impact of permeable alleys and rain gardens in cul-de-sacs.

Given the magnitude of the Village's stormwater issues west of Ridge Road, green infrastructure alone cannot solve the problem. The current proposed stormwater improvement project includes eight miles of new pipes (adjacent to and connected to our existing system of pipes) to hold more stormwater and more quickly transport stormwater out of neighborhoods during major storm events.

## **7. How would you balance homeowners' desires to expand their homes with the need to decrease the amount of impervious surfaces within the village?**

**Kathy Dodd:** We have well established codes for surface area coverage and impervious surfaces and we should adhere to them. They exist for good reason. At the same time, I believe we need to be make adjustments to our code for situations where residents use modern surfaces (e.g. porous asphalt/concrete, PICPs) that are pervious but the village code still considers impervious.

**Joel Kurzman:** The primary work should happen at the Zoning Board, but Village policy must be consistent throughout all Boards, Commissions, and Code. For example, it's unproductive for the Board of Trustees to stop every residential request that removes pervious surfaces and clears the Zoning Board. That said, I think the Zoning Board and Plan Commission should be more engaged about the storm water issue. Having consistent policy in place throughout the Village will make it easier to educate and enforce sound development practices on individual properties. The Board of Trustees should prioritize addressing the largest storm water run-off contributors. They should also work with the Village President to ensure someone with storm water and environmental expertise is appointed to the Zoning Board and Plan Commission.

**Stephen M. Leonard:** We need to enforce setback requirements and provide fewer opportunities to relax the rules. I watch developers demolishing one home and building two on top of each other and it really makes me angry. This type of density is only good for the developer. The community suffers while the developer laughs all the way to the bank.

However, as we keep this as a goal, we have to be careful not to trample on homeowners existing rights. This needs to be a fair and equitable policy that works with property owners over time with ample warning and plenty of time to comply. If we try to just impose this type of change too fast, parties will be hurt and opposition will be fierce. The only way to commence something like this is through open discussion, consensus building and then eventual action embraced by the majority of people.

**Reinhold Schneider:** From my experience on the Zoning Board, home improvements that expand the footprint have a minimal impact on the impervious surface.

**Bob Bielinski:** The Village Board pays particular attention to and scrutinizes closely requests for floor area ratio (FAR) and impervious surface coverage variations during land use deliberations. I will continue to apply the standards of the zoning ordinance in a fair and impartial way.

To preserve older homes with pre-zoning code designs, the Village Board may find that hardship exists and grant a zoning variance to allow a homeowner to renovate the home and bring it up to modern living standards.

## ACTIVE TRANSPORTATION

### 8. What role do you think the village should play in improving local bicycle, pedestrian, and public transit transportation options?

**Kathy Dodd:** Bicycle, pedestrian, and public transportation options all have a role in our overall transportation model. Unfortunately, this is an older community and our existing space is almost completely built out. There is very little land for new bike/walking trails. I'd like to see the village restart conversations around creating a path on the west side where the abandon railroad easement sits. It's probably the most likely initiative to get approved and funded.

**Joel Kurzman:** Regardless whether one views it as a transportation issue or as a child and senior safety issue, the Village can play a role to improve bicycle, pedestrian, and public transportation options. In particular, as it relates to bicycling throughout our Village, linking our amazing neighborhoods, schools, parks, and commercial centers would build community and improve quality of life.

**Stephen M. Leonard:** Bike lanes are essential and should be provided where possible. I know there is a proposal being considered for a bike lane on Central as that roadway is being redesigned. This is a perfect example where the Village can make a huge difference.

Maintenance of these bike lanes are just as important as initial creation. Maybe we could involve the community via a program similar to "Adopt a Highway" elsewhere. Maybe a local Boy Scout troop could adopt one stretch of bike lane, and a local retailer could adopt another. Once again, this public/private partnership may be the best way to go in the long run.

**Bob Bielinski:** In general, Wilmette should be as bicycle and pedestrian friendly as possible within the practical limitations of the Village's existing infrastructure of roads and transportation facilities. For example, the upcoming intersection improvements at Hibbard Road and Skokie Boulevard should dramatically increase pedestrian safety at this difficult crossing.

The Village should undertake a comprehensive review of its transportation infrastructure with an emphasis on understanding how changes downtown and elsewhere have impacted traffic patterns and usability for all constituents.

## COMMUNITY OUTREACH

**9. How would you help the village increase communication with residents about sustainability practices that would benefit the community? What three topics would you prioritize for communication?**

**Kathy Dodd:** Go Green Wilmette and the village have already demonstrated good collaboration to proactively promote sustainability. Examples of these joint efforts include the recycling of Christmas trees, Styrofoam, and unused prescription drugs. In addition, I'd like to see:

1. more access to recycling of toxic materials like batteries, paints, and fluorescent fixtures
2. an increase in the village tree planting budget (which has been reduced over the last several years due to the recession)
3. a push towards less visual pollution like signs and utilities poles.

I would like to see a regular column in the Village Communicator focused on sustainability. We can use that to both promote new initiatives as well as remind residents of existing programs to better maximize their impacts.

**Joel Kurzman:** Another plank of my Stewardship platform is improved transparency and accountability at Village Hall. I am calling for all meetings, not just the Board of Trustees meetings, to be televised or streamed. If we achieved this goal, all the ideas advocated by GGW and/or WCAT at the Wilmette Environmental and Energy Commission and other meetings could be communicated more widely.

**Stephen M. Leonard:** Composting- I am aware the Village does some composting of lawn waste at the West Park facility. However, if there were a way to expand this to allow kitchen scraps, I know many people would gladly participate that don't compost at home.

LED Lighting- Everyone should be converting their bulbs to LED as quickly as possible. Maybe this could be a competition for kids at school. Prizes and notoriety could be offered.

Sprinkler Waste- According to most landscaping experts, we all over water our landscaping. If we could educate people on how frequently to water and how much to water, we could possibly save a great deal of resources. I know in my home, we have an old computerized sprinkler controller. If the Village, for a small fee, were to offer services to reprogram the controller to more optimally use the water resource, it could be a fast, easy and cheap way to get something for almost nothing.

**Bob Bielinski:** Given that most residents' have limited time to effectively focus on and process all information provided by different units of local government, the Village should focus its communication, for at least the next twelve months, on proposed solutions to the stormwater management issues west of Ridge Road. Stormwater management is the issue of the day, and as such, it must be the Village's communication priority.

## ENVIRONMENTAL AND ENERGY COMMISSION

### 10. What specific issues would you particularly like to see the Wilmette Environmental and Energy Commission (EEC) address this year?

**Kathy Dodd:** As mentioned in my response to Q8, I'd like to see us tackle creating a path on the west side where the abandoned railroad easement sits.

**Joel Kurzman:** If not addressed previously, I might suggest education and awareness about invasive species such as buckthorns. Many residents assume buckthorns are trees and are not aware of how they crowd out native plants and other more productive landscaping. Although far down my priority list, a concerted effort to remove buckthorns is among the green practices I have previously recommended.

**Stephen M. Leonard:** Electric Cars- Although many of our residents have Teslas which cost over \$100,000, this is beyond most budgets. With a whole new selection of more affordable and more efficient electric cars on the way in coming years, maybe the ECC could provide some incentives or recognition for these purchases such as recognition in a public place, free dinner at a local restaurant, etc. Sometimes the little things are all it takes to get people headed in the right direction.

**Reinhold Schneider:**

- a. Alternatives to fossil fuels
- b. Energy audits - businesses and homeowners
- c. Reducing rainwater run-off

**Bob Bielinski:** The Environmental and Energy Commission (EEC) serves as an advisory body to the Village Board to provide advice and education on environmental issues. The process by which the recent coal tar ban was enacted is a great example of how the Environmental and Energy Commission can play a significant role in supporting the Village Board with its policy responsibilities. As specific issues arise on which the EEC's advice would be helpful, I will continue to call upon their expertise to supplement the Board's understanding of the issues.