

Conservation Questionnaire for Wake Forest Municipal Election 2025

Keith Shackelford

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 Unified Development Ordinance (UDO) provides a strong foundation for environmental protection, especially in areas like water resource management, pollution reduction, and green space connectivity. It's a living document, and I support continued updates to strengthen its environmental provisions where feasible. During my time on the Board, I've supported investments in public parks and greenways — including the extensions of the greenways and improvements to our parks. Public green space offers the most reliable path to long-term conservation in Wake Forest. These spaces are accessible to all residents and can be actively managed to protect tree canopy, biodiversity, and water quality. While broader forest conservation is ideal and extremely important, we must respect private property rights, especially within town limits. That's why I prioritize conservation efforts on public land, where we have both the authority and responsibility to act. As for initiatives like 'dark skies,' I'm open to exploring practical steps to reduce light pollution — especially near parks and natural areas— while balancing safety and community needs. The pending UDO expands and fine tunes requirements for lighting in commercial developments, with height restrictions and specifications about the types of lighting.

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

Response: The Town can take several steps to encourage developers to preserve trees and wildlife habitat. First, we can create and strengthen incentives for projects that protect mature trees, preserve natural buffers, or incorporate wildlife corridors beyond the requirements. These voluntary tools can reward good stewardship without imposing mandates that may conflict with property rights. Second, we can improve transparency and early engagement. When developers meet with staff and neighbors early in the process, there's more opportunity to identify and preserve valuable natural features before plans are finalized. Third, we should continue investing in public green space. By expanding parks, greenways, and tree canopy on Town-owned land, we ensure long-term protection and access for all residents. This is a practical and effective way to preserve habitat within our growing community.

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 near the Reservoir, is critical to our region's drinking water, flood resilience, and ecological health. I believe the Town can take several practical steps to strengthen stream buffer protection while respecting private property rights. First, we can prioritize conservation on Town-owned land and in future public acquisitions. By expanding greenways and natural buffers along Smith Creek and its tributaries, we create lasting protection for water quality and wildlife habitat. I've supported these efforts during my time on the Board, including improvements to the Smith Creek Greenway and stormwater infrastructure near the Reservoir. Second, we can work with developers to preserve natural buffers voluntarily — especially in areas that drain into the Reservoir. Incentives, early engagement, and clear expectations can help protect sensitive areas

without imposing blanket restrictions. Third, we can continue to enforce and refine our stormwater regulations. Proper erosion control, low-impact design, and post-construction maintenance are essential to keeping sediment and pollutants out of our waterways.

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: Protecting watersheds and green corridors that cross municipal boundaries requires strong regional collaboration. Wake Forest can work more effectively with Raleigh, Rolesville, and Franklin County by focusing on shared planning, consistent standards, and joint investment in public green space. First, we can strengthen intergovernmental coordination through regional planning bodies and watershed partnerships. For example, aligning our land use plans and stormwater standards with neighboring jurisdictions helps protect water quality and habitat across the entire basin, not just within our borders. Second, we can pursue joint conservation projects, especially along shared corridors like Smith Creek and Richland Creek. Whether it's expanding greenways, restoring stream buffers, or acquiring land for public parks, these efforts benefit all communities and can be more cost-effective when done together. Third, we must advocate for state-level support and funding. Many of these watersheds are part of the Neuse River basin and protecting them serves broader environmental and public health goals. I believe Wake Forest can play a leadership role in shaping regional priorities and securing resources. While each jurisdiction has its own authority and constraints, we share a responsibility to protect the natural systems that connect us.

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, the Town can encourage, and in some cases condition, rezoning and land use approvals on the use of advanced stormwater practices like rain gardens, bioswales, and permeable pavement. These tools help reduce runoff, improve water quality, and support long-term resilience, especially in sensitive areas near streams and reservoirs. However, our ability to require these practices depends on the type of approval and the legal framework in place. For example, during a rezoning or special use permit process, the Town has more flexibility to negotiate site design features. In contrast, by-right developments are governed by existing UDO standards, which may limit our leverage. Ultimately, protecting water quality requires a mix of smart regulation, practical incentives, and collaborative design.

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

Response: Growing responsibly means finding ways to add affordable housing while protecting the green space that defines Wake Forest's character. We can do both, but it requires thoughtful planning, early engagement, and a commitment to long-term stewardship. First, we can focus new housing near existing infrastructure — especially in areas with access to transit, schools, and services. This helps reduce sprawl and protects undeveloped land, including forested areas and stream buffers. Second, we can promote compact, conservation-minded design. Clustered housing, mixed-use development, and cottage courts can preserve more open space while offering diverse housing options. Third, we must continue investing in public green space. As we grow, parks and greenways become even more important — not just for recreation, but for stormwater management, biodiversity, and community health. Affordable housing and conservation aren't mutually exclusive. With the right tools and partnerships, we can grow in a way that reflects our values and protects what makes Wake Forest special.

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: I support policies that make it easier to redevelop underused sites within already developed areas. This approach helps us grow responsibly — adding housing and commercial space where infrastructure already exists — while reducing pressure to clear forests. Redevelopment can also support affordability, walkability, and environmental sustainability. By reusing land near transit, schools, and services, we protect green space, reduce traffic impacts, and make better use of public investments. We need clear standards, predictable review processes, and incentives that make infill development attractive to both residents and builders. I've supported updates to our zoning and land use policies that promote these goals. Preserving Wake Forest's character means protecting our natural assets — especially public parks and greenways — while guiding growth toward areas that can support it. Redevelopment is one of the most practical ways to achieve that balance.