**Sierra Club & Clean Water Action Baltimore City Candidate Questionnaire**

**2024 Baltimore City Races**

This questionnaire covers environmental issues you will likely consider as an elected leader of Baltimore City. Thank you for taking time to answer these important questions. Your answers will be a key factor in endorsement decisions.

This questionnaire is for internal use only and will not be shared outside of the confidential endorsement process. However, the Sierra Club-Maryland Chapter and Clean Water Action reserve the right to make public specific portions of this document should any candidate’s stated position or actions directly contradict submitted answers.

If you want to seek endorsement by the Sierra Club or Clean Water Action, please submit your completed questionnaire no later than February 9, 2024.

Please email your completed questionnaire to Rob Frier at rob.frier@gmail.com and Denise Davis at ddjdmls@msn.com.

Please contact Rob Frier at rob.frier@gmail.com if you have any questions.

*Please provide the information requested below.*

**Candidate:** Thiru Vignarajah

# Office Sought: Mayor

**Party:** Democrat

**Campaign Committee Name:** Friends of Thiru Vignarajah

**Campaign Committee Address:** 1211 Light Street, Baltimore, MD 21230

**Campaign Committee City / State / Zip:** Baltimore, MD 21230

**Website:** www.thiruformayor.com

**Campaign Office Phone:** (410) 456-7552

**Campaign Manager:** Joe Lorick

**Cell#:** (410) 419-3229 **Email:** joe@votethiru.com

**General Campaign Contact:** Brent Bedarka

**Cell#:** (410) 292-3605 **Email:** press@votethiru.com

# Introduction

In relation to your questions, here are six major changes I will enact and undertake as Mayor of Baltimore:

1. Break the contract with Wheelabrator and Macquarie Infrastructure Partners and permanently shut down the incinerator. Bring to Baltimore instead its first mixedwaste materials recovery facility (MRF).

1. Recruit a world-class Deputy Mayor for Climate, Energy, and Sustainability.

1. Forbid any new natural gas hookups beginning in 2026 and provide low-interest loans to homeowners going electric to cover any shortfalls after federal and state incentives.

1. Block the construction of luxury apartments on the water’s edge and remove the massive electronic billboards that now dominate the downtown streetscape.

1. Reverse presumptions so that 85% of requests for the City to pay sewage backup are approved, rather than denied.

1. Create east-west thoroughfares solely dedicated to free public transit including, for example, expanded Circulator routes into West Baltimore.

These are certainly not the only pledges I would make or policies I would enact. But these commitments illustrate how I approach problems and showcase, I hope, how different a candidate I am, in form and substance, than the two former Mayors.

# Good Government

1. Do you commit to meeting with advocates before introducing, supporting or amending a bill on an issue that concerns them? What mechanisms will you use to provide transparency in your office?

# Yes or No: Yes

In the past, some of the City’s most consequential environmental decisions — from renewing the Wheelabrator contract to the de facto sale of the conduit system to investing in another century of gas infrastructure — have been made behind closed doors. That is no accident. The lack of *timely* input from advocates and the general public is partly why these terrible decisions were made. That will change on day one.

As Mayor, I will adopt a fully transparent and deliberative process on both policy changes and land use decisions. If climate change and environmental justice are existential crises, then we need to restructure city government to reflect it. I will therefore create a new Deputy Mayor for Climate, Energy, and Sustainability. This gives Baltimore a chance to recruit a world-class advocate and gives that person a chance to shape, with direct supervisory power, every decision the City makes that impacts our environment, from construction standards to clean energy.

I will also reconstitute the Baltimore Commission on Sustainability to not merely oversee the implementation of the city’s sustainability plan but also to weigh in on policy actions, City Council ordinances, and other actions in real-time. This group, along with the Deputy Mayor, would meet with me at least quarterly with additional real-time opportunities for concrete input as emergent issues arise. We will also ensure that all public documents, proposals, and applications are easily accessible online well before final decisions are made to provide meaningful opportunities for public input.

# Lead Exposure

2. City residents continue to suffer from high rates of lead poisoning, which leads to serious reading disabilities and behavior issues among children. Will you support council action and budgetary resources to protect our children and create a healthier, more affordable housing stock free of lead paint? Likewise, will you support council action and budgetary resources to complete the Department of Public Works’s current search for lead service lines and the complete replacement of all lead service lines in Baltimore? And are you aware of lead dust from defunct toxic powerlines and will you work to push power companies to remove them?

# Yes or No: Yes

Like many environmental justice problems in Baltimore, the challenge with lead is not identifying the problem but rather insufficient strategic action in response. Baltimore has a complex history with lead poisoning, from Baltimore’s first-in-the-nation ban of lead paint in 1951 (27 years before the federal ban) to the Kennedy Krieger Institute’s unethical study of predominately low-income, Black Baltimore residents living in houses with lead in the 1990s. Baltimore has made significant improvements in the last fifteen years, reducing the number of children testing positive for lead paint by 97% from 1992 to 2016. Yet thousands of old homes still have unabated lead paint. The protocols remain far too reactionary, and houses coated in lead paint are concentrated in low-income, predominantly Black and brown neighborhoods where landlords are reluctant to invest in addressing the issue. The current policies include home visits resulting in referrals to legal and financial resources, education on the dangers of lead poisoning, and testing (which itself is plagued by unethical operators who will provide false lead certifications for a price, an issue we investigated and cracked down on when I was deputy attorney general under Attorney General Brian Frosh).

These measures fail to address the root cause of the issue and have failed to eradicate the problem. It is unacceptable that 79 years after lead paint was banned in Baltimore, we still have hundreds of children suffering from lead poisoning every year. In 2018, Baltimore City had three times more children suffering from lead poisoning than any other county in Maryland. I will not only support Council action but will also take responsibility for ensuring we formulate a solution to this decades-old problem—building upon work that I did as Maryland’s Deputy Attorney General—to force landlords to address lead issues. By taking immediate action, we can ensure that lead poisoning does not derail any more lives by stinting development, increasing violent actions, and developing behavioral challenges.

In addition to eliminating lead paint, guaranteeing clean, safe drinking water must be one of the highest priorities of city government. Access to quality, reliable, and affordable water is a human right. We have hundred-year-old pipes that are likely unsafe, but we don’t know because of a lack of testing. Under my administration, Baltimore will require water testing across the entire city, including all high-risk locations; replace all lead service lines (through a partnership with local hospitals, who are required to spend a portion of revenues on local health projects, the state [DWSRF], and the EPA’s lead pipe replacement funding from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law); and provide filtration systems as a stop-gap for homes that need immediate relief until construction is completed. As Mayor, I will always work on the side of residents to ensure every household receives safe water. DPW is riddled with problems—from failure to collect and transmit water bills to mismanagement of data—and these revenues must be reinvested into replacing our failing infrastructure. I have called for an independent forensic audit of all agencies and believe the DPW audit will reveal gaping holes in systems and processes related to safe, clean water.

I also commit to taking on BGE on lead dust from toxic defunct powerlines. I’ve taken on BGE to stop the expansion of natural gas infrastructure by preventing the unwanted deployment of external natural gas regulators, and I will do it again.

**[For the Mayor Only:]** The US Bi-Partisan Infrastructure Act provides funds for lead pipe and paint removal. How will you assure that Baltimore is positioned to take full advantage of the law as it moves toward national implementation?

**Explain:**

The Scott Administration has been woefully negligent in its failure to pursue the nearly $30 billion available under the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law to replace lead pipes ($15 billion specifically for lead pipe replacement, $12 billion for the State Revolving Fund) or apply any of the $641 million the city received from the American Rescue Plan, which could also have been used specifically for lead pipe replacement after Congress expanded the allowable usages. Maryland and Baltimore specifically have received significantly less for lead service line replacement, and I am committed to working with the congressional delegation and the Biden Administration to ensure Baltimore is no longer left behind. It is also unconscionable that Maryland was not selected as one of the lead service replacement accelerator states by the EPA.

# Stormwater Management

3. As storms increase in severity, sewers will need to handle greater water flow. Will you encourage the Department of Public Works to prioritize repairs aimed at preventing backups into people’s homes? Baltimore City DPW currently offers emergency cleanup assistance for backups into people’s homes through the Sewage Onsite Support (SOS) program, but only backups caused by wet weather. EPA and MDE have ordered

Baltimore City DPW to expand this program to all backups caused by issues in city infrastructure, but DPW is refusing to comply with the order. **For the Mayoral candidates:** Will you instruct DPW to comply with EPA/MDE’s order and provide emergency assistance to all households facing backups originating in City infrastructure? **For the Council candidates:** Will you advocate and make budgetary resources available for DPW to comply with EPA/MDE’s order and provide emergency assistance to all households facing backups originating in City infrastructure?

# Yes or No: Yes

I would direct DPW to comply with the EPA and MDE order and commence providing emergency assistance within 90 days of me becoming Mayor.

Despite some improvements over the past few years, the fact that 14 million gallons of sewage discharged into Baltimore Harbor and surrounding streams and waterways in just one day shows that we have much work to do. We will never clean up the Harbor or the Bay if millions of gallons of sewage continue to overwhelm antiquated combined overflow systems that transform our outdated stormwater system into a pollution superhighway, while also leading to unsanitary sewage backups in thousands of homes and causing fish kills in our waterways. As climate change brings more intense and cumulative precipitation, as Mayor, I intend to make Baltimore the most aggressive city in the nation when it comes to building and requiring green or natural infrastructure. Connected to my commitment to plant 130,000 trees and reclaim open space throughout the City, naturebased solutions will be the preferred means of slowing the velocity and volume of stormwater. By capturing more runoff before it hits the stormwater system, we can both rightsize the improvements to the man-made infrastructure and end the sewer backup.

The Back River Wastewater Treatment plant serves 1.3 million people in and around Baltimore by treating 180 million gallons of wastewater daily. Despite some recent investments at Back River and Patapsco wastewater treatment plants, we need to continue to invest in our critically important wastewater system that protects our environment and contributes to sustainable water use, and we need to make sure that we have the professional operators who can manage the systems to remedy the ongoing compliance issues. As Mayor, I will partner with the State to accelerate this work by taking advantage of improvements and expanded federal resources for the Clean Water State Revolving Funds that provide greater resources to low-income communities like Baltimore, while providing additional local funding to expedite the improvements needed to improve the operations of Black River, particularly during heavy rainfall.

DPW is supposed to provide a $2,500 subsidy to homeowners for cleaning and repairing homes damaged by sewer backups due to the city’s crumbling infrastructure. However, DPW only processed 67% of claims and denied 85% of those claims. This is unacceptable—in fact, 100% of claims should be processed, and 85% of them should be approved. Homeowners should not be subject to a financial penalty because municipal water infrastructure and services, something exquisitely within the role and responsibility of the City to provide and maintain, causes destruction to their homes. I will ensure all claims are processed in a timely fashion and ensure that all legitimate claims are paid.

It should be noted that refusing to pay for sewage backups caused by the failures and deficits of aging infrastructure is par for the course in a City that seems to believe—for largely fiscal reasons—that it cannot afford to do right by its residents when it comes to costs and consequents that result from Baltimore’s failing infrastructure. For example, I have fought for months alongside homeowners on North Avenue whose properties were lost after a sinkhole formed after an aging 115-year storm drain collapsed. It had not been expected in years, yet the City has refused to pay and remains mired in litigation.

That is not right. If a resident endures costs and consequences due to an infrastructure failure that is within Baltimore City’s power and responsibility to prevent, the City should foot the bill, not the homeowner. That should apply to sewage backups, excessive water bills, and property destruction because of street-level sinkholes.

4. Will you prioritize increasing the use of green stormwater infrastructure (e.g. rain gardens, trees, permeable surfaces, bioswales) for addressing Baltimore's stormwater management, nuisance flooding, and community greening needs?

# Yes or No: Yes

Given the projected rates of precipitation, sustained flooding, and extreme weather events fueled by climate change, green infrastructure can no longer be a novelty in Baltimore’s resilience strategy — it must be at the core of it. Natural defenses, like restoring wetlands, reforesting, planting rain gardens, and revegetating every available acre of land, will be the primary ways in which my Administration will fulfill our responsibilities to protect communities and remove nutrients, bacteria, and other contaminants from entering our surface waters. These kinds of defenses should be integrated into every new construction project as a requirement, and they should be added to existing buildings through incentives.

Baltimore is still behind schedule in complying with the 2017 Modified Sewer Consent Decree, despite spending more than $1 billion on expensive engineered solutions. The reality is that, despite some critical investments, we still have discharge pipes that remain wide open spewing pollution, including for example along Jones Falls. The failure to prioritize these glaring system deficits reflects poorly on Baltimore’s commitment to our city’s physical presentation, our residents’ health, and the environment. While the Headworks Project is supposed to drastically improve sewage flow with the effect of reducing backups into homes and the stream of waste into Baltimore’s Harbor, that only works if we have the requisite professional operators to run the facility. Despite all of this, I firmly believe that a more comprehensive stormwater strategy built around a “nature first” philosophy would do much more to achieve multiple objectives simultaneously, and as Mayor I will ensure that all future decisions incorporate nature-based solutions. This “nature first” approach will not only promote cleaner water and less flooding, but will also help reduce pollution and sequester carbon, increase property values, beautify the city, and produce other intrinsic benefits like improving residents’ mental health, encouraging physical activity, creating sustainable-wage jobs, and renewing community pride.

In addition, my administration will tackle the trash pouring into Baltimore’s Inner Harbor, which is not only an eyesore indicative of a lack of respect for the appearance of our City, but also poses serious health concerns and harms the Chesapeake Bay ecosystem. We must enforce the existing litter laws, drastically expand recycling, and ensure sufficient receptacles for litter and pet waste throughout the city. Since the introduction of Mr. Trash Wheel in May 2014, the Trash Wheel family has collected 1,356 tons of trash. This is a real, tangible solution to a problem plaguing Baltimore, and I will support the expansion of the popular Trash Wheel family within Baltimore’s Harbor. I will also support efforts to place nets at stormwater outfalls to prevent trash from entering our surface waters in the first place, while working to retain passage for fish and other aquatic species.

5. Stream restoration efforts in Baltimore currently employ heavy construction equipment to modify stream channels with the intent to handle stormwater runoff. These efforts involve a mix of straightening or changing a stream's natural patterns in an attempt to control the movement or pooling of the water. Such methods typically include removal of many mature trees and other biodiversity with little meaningful restoration or environmental damage mitigation despite opposition from residents, environmentalists, and scientists. (ER4054 -Western Herring Run restoration is widely opposed and will remove at least 700 mature trees.) Will you support efforts to address stormwater management through more sustainable means, and ensure that meaningful ecology restoration is a key requirement of city stream restoration projects?

# Yes or No: Yes

This decision is simply insane. It shows what happens when you have a number of civil engineers, but few ecologists and conservation biologists, designing flood abatement projects. It simply makes no sense to remove trees to protect against flooding, considering the end result is worsened erosion and degraded biodiversity. Instead of straightening or altering natural stream patterns, we will prioritize natural channel design approaches that mimic the natural flow and function of streams. This can involve techniques such as meander restoration, floodplain reconnection, and the use of bioengineering methods to stabilize stream banks. We need to put “nature first” and ensure that there is a net conservation and biodiversity gain from all civil works projects. We will prioritize the preservation and enhancement of habitat for native flora and fauna in stream restoration projects. This may involve retaining mature trees, planting native vegetation, creating habitat structures such as log jams and riffle pools, and incorporating features that support wildlife corridors. Finally, as Mayor, I will implement robust monitoring and adaptive management practices to track the effectiveness of stream restoration efforts over time. This will involve monitoring water quality, habitat conditions, and ecological indicators to evaluate project success and make adjustments as needed.

# Solid Waste

6. Baltimore City is responsible for managing municipal solid waste. Zero Waste is the conservation of all resources by means of responsible production, consumption, reuse, and recovery of products, packaging, and materials without burning and no discharges to land, water, or air that threaten the environment or human health. Will you work to enact policies to move Baltimore City closer to this goal during your term in office? What actions would you support or propose to improve recycling and reduce waste and litter on our streets and in our waterways? Will you prioritize operational spending on Zero Waste programs and capital spending on composting and recycling infrastructure in the City’s Solid Waste budget?

# Yes or No: Yes

Baltimore should aspire to become the first zero-waste city in America. The old adage of “reduce, reuse, recycle” is still true today, and that principle can create an entirely local and sustainable circular economy. As Mayor, I would invest public dollars in a state-ofthe-art materials recovery facility (MRF) that would help sort both trash and comingled recyclables to pull out all assets that could be reused or recycled. With the collapse of many parts of the global market for recyclables, I would focus on increasing local economic development opportunities for the reuse of separated materials. Providing these feedstocks at low or no cost to businesses could create a competitive advantage over competitors who are paying for virgin raw materials. Ideally, as these changes take hold, we could replace traditional trash collection with universal recycling to be processed at our new MRF. To make this a functional market, we would need to work with local businesses to phase out non-recyclable packaging (building upon Sierra Club’s leadership convincing Annapolis to ban Styrofoam in restaurants/coffee shops).

To reduce litter on our streets and in our waterways, I will ensure there are convenient, accessible recycling receptacles throughout the city that minimize the work required from the disposer, i.e., proper signage and open holes instead of covered access points. These receptacles would have sufficiently frequent pickups to ensure no overflow. In conjunction with the expansion of green spaces to minimize stormwater runoff, I would invest in green spaces to make the city more attractive, discouraging people from littering. This investment and the expansion of receptacles would occur in every neighborhood, with a conscious concentration of investment in neighborhoods currently lacking green space or receptacles. It is unacceptable for the cleanliness of the streets and the greenness of the neighborhood to correspond to the income level of its residents. Everyone wants clean streets, and everyone deserves them.

The recent explosion of a youth-driven environmental movement to protect our planet for future generations has been inspiring. I would build on this existing passion by encouraging schools to participate in litter collection competitions, plastic-free events for school functions, outdoor learning experiences, and seminars on the benefits of recycling and composting. This would naturally disperse information regarding zero-waste principles across the city.

I would finance these programs by saving tens of millions of dollars annually by avoiding tipping fees and payments to the incinerators, as well as identifying existing wasteful spending in city agencies through top-to-bottom audits, stringent fiscal management of agency budgets, seeking non-profit and private partnerships, and applications for grant funding from the MDE and the EPA.

1. Organic waste, like food scraps and yard trim, is 30-40% of the average municipal waste stream and, when left in the waste stream, creates carbon emission when burned in an incinerator and methane emissions when decomposed in a landfill. Do you agree that city-wide compost collection and the establishment of composting facilities at scale is critical to divert waste from landfill and incineration? If, so what would you do to expand compost collection and processing in the city?

Yes—I am very excited about the idea of a citywide composting program. This will reduce carbon and methane emissions while creating jobs and creating rich soil that could sustain an unprecedented regenerative urban agriculture initiative. I will pull together the best and brightest to learn from the lessons of San Francisco, Seattle, Portland, Boulder, and most recently, New York City. We must identify the infrastructure needed to ensure universal participation, likely through curbside pickup and regional compost facilities (with state-ofthe-art membranes to eliminate odors and prevent emission leakage) that are ideally colocated where urban agriculture could take place.

1. The Comprehensive Bag Reduction Act of 2021 banned film plastic bags less than 4 mils thick. This has allowed some stores to provide single-use film plastic bags that are 4 mils thick. Would you support a bill to remove the 4 mil thickness standard for film plastic bags thereby eliminating all film plastic bags?

# Yes or No: Yes

Plastic film continues to pollute our waterways and gum up our water treatment facilities. I would support eliminating all film plastic bags.

9. **[For the Mayor only:]** In your meetings with the city delegation and/or Governor Moore regarding legislative issues to be addressed by the General Assembly, will you include advocacy for the following Zero Waste priorities:

a. the Beverage Container Recycling Refund and Litter Reduction Program, the provisions of which have resulted in a 90% plastic bottle recycling rate in MI and Oregon vs. MD’s 23% rate?

# Yes or No: Yes

We need a bottle bill in Maryland. States with bottle bills, like Michigan, Maine, and Oregon, have several-fold higher bottle recycling rates than those without, like Maryland. I will push the State delegation and the Governor to make this a priority.

b. The Reclaim Renewable Energy Act, which will eliminate trash incineration from Maryland’s Renewable Standard, redirecting ratepayer money wasted to profit polluting trash incinerators like the BRESCO incinerator in Baltimore to support truly renewable energy that will help clean Baltimore’s air instead?

# Yes or No: Yes

Four years ago, I committed to shutting down the BRESCO incinerator and remain committed to it today. I remember now-Mayor Brandon Scott making the same promise before unconscionably extending the contract for a decade. That contract is legally defective. Accordingly, I will give the international parent conglomerate a chance to convert that contract into a presumptive right to build the City a materials recovery facility, or I will break the contract, tie up the company in litigation for five years, and allow all companies to bid on the privilege. Either way, in my first term, Baltimore will shut down the incinerator permanently and replace it with a materials recovery solution fit for the next generation.

# Transportation

10. A successful 21st Century city needs a comprehensive public transportation system to support its economy, equity, and the climate. Cities around the country and the world are expanding rail, building Bus Rapid Transit lines, transitioning to electric buses, adding protected bike lanes and new walking trails, and placing much greater emphasis on pedestrian safety. People using public transportation in Baltimore can access only a small percent of the jobs in the metropolitan area within an hour. Do you support increased regional transit investments in Baltimore like those described above? What will you do to help make this type of comprehensive 21st Century public transportation system a priority for Baltimore?

# Yes or No: Yes

Yes. Mobility is crucial to economic development and upward mobility. I plan to invest in transit expansion in a sustainable, environmentally conscious manner. Currently, our eastto-west avenues are dedicated to motor traffic. In my first 100 days as Mayor, I intend to repurpose some of the avenues exclusively for public and green transportation. We will provide free east-to-west buses, bike lanes, and pedestrian passages along these avenues. The elimination of cars from these passages would improve the safety of bicyclists and pedestrians by simply reducing the volume of traffic. The concentrated motor traffic on the remaining avenues would likely decrease Baltimoreans’ desire to drive, while the free and green transit options would see a corresponding increase in popularity as the faster and cheaper option, causing a natural reduction in motor transportation and air pollution—all of which will be paid for by the increase in revenues from increased employment. My vision is that we quickly demonstrate demand for East-West transit through expanded free bus lines along Edmondson Avenue and North Avenue and then add some of the crisscrossing arteries like Belair Road and Harford Road.

11. The Moore Administration is currently undergoing planning efforts for the revived Red Line. Will you advocate to the Moore Administration that the Red Line be constructed as light rail rather than bus rapid transit, which will serve more riders at less annualized capital cost per trip?

# Yes or No: Yes

My proposed free buses should complement light rail, not replace it. Governor Moore’s inclination to replace the original commitment to light rail with bus rapid transit is shortsighted. I will do everything in my power to restart a light-rail Red Line 2.0 with the goal of completion by 2032. In the meantime, I will immediately start a free east-to-west bus system with the green avenues referenced above.

12. Active transit is an important component of mobility throughout the city and of reducing emissions from the transportation sector. Will you support the development of more pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure in Baltimore, and how will you ensure that the City is safe for pedestrians and bicyclists to travel throughout the City?

# Yes or No: Yes

I am fully committed to supporting the development of more pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure throughout Baltimore, and the recent debates pitting communities against one another on the topic of bike lanes is unfortunate and unnecessary. Active transit is not only essential for improving mobility and reducing emissions from the transportation sector but also for promoting public health and creating vibrant, livable communities.

Great cities everywhere have comprehensive bike infrastructure, and that must be Baltimore’s goal too. To ensure Baltimore is safe for pedestrians and bicyclists to travel, we will take a comprehensive approach that focuses on several key strategies:

Investing in Infrastructure: We will prioritize investments in pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure, including the development of safe and accessible sidewalks, bike lanes, multi-use trails, and pedestrian-friendly streetscapes. This will involve working closely with city agencies, community organizations, and transportation advocates to identify key priority areas and allocate resources effectively. That will also include providing incentives in the form of grants, subsidies, or tax breaks to communities and neighbors who are bearing an unwanted or undue burden because of the addition of infrastructure.

Enhancing Safety Measures: We will implement targeted safety measures to protect pedestrians and bicyclists, such as traffic calming measures, improved street lighting, and the installation of pedestrian crossings and bike-friendly intersections. Additionally, we will explore innovative solutions such as dedicated bike signals and protected bike lanes to further enhance safety.

Promoting Education and Awareness: We will launch public education campaigns to raise awareness about the rights and responsibilities of pedestrians and bicyclists, as well as driver awareness programs to encourage safer driving behaviors and respect for vulnerable road users. These efforts will be aimed at fostering a culture of mutual respect and understanding among all road users.

Community Engagement and Input: We will actively engage with communities and stakeholders to solicit input and feedback on pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure projects, ensuring that they reflect the needs and priorities of residents across the city. Community input will be integral to the planning, design, and implementation of active transit initiatives.

Data-Driven Decision Making: We will use data and metrics to evaluate the effectiveness of pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure projects and identify areas for improvement. This will involve monitoring crash data, traffic volumes, and usage patterns to inform future investments and policy decisions.

By taking a holistic approach to pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure development and prioritizing safety, accessibility, and community engagement, we can create a city where walking and biking are safe, convenient, cost-effective, and enjoyable modes of transportation for all residents.

# Environmental Justice

13. Many of Baltimore’s economically disadvantaged areas are subject to the hazards of environmentally harmful industries and facilities located in their communities. Air pollution from these sites impacts health and can cause asthma. According to the Baltimore City Department of Health, the city’s children have an asthma rate twice the national average. What will you do to ensure that all neighborhoods receive protection when projects or developments that would introduce additional sources of pollution are proposed?

# Yes or No: Yes

Environmental racism continues to persist in Baltimore—and not just from facilities sited half a century ago, but with recent siting decisions in the past two few decades. While I applaud efforts to encourage an “equity screen” of various budget decisions, the reality continues that polluting facilities, like the incinerator, are disproportionately sited in communities of color. This isn’t just about spending money — it’s about structural racism cloaked in land use decisions.

I have proposed that any industrial facility or energy generating facility require a cumulative impacts analysis similar to NEPA (before Trump’s illegal rollback, which the Biden Administration is working to repromulgate) or California’s Environmental Quality Act (CEQA)—and a commensurate level of sustained public outreach in the communities most affected. The aggregate impacts of the siting of power plants and industrial facilities close to neighborhoods, combined with the locations of 95 and 83 bringing cars and heavyduty trucks through city neighborhoods to spew particulate matter (the recently proposed nine-microgram standard will help reduce this) and NO2, continue to be a public health disaster, even after years of efforts to reduce ozone and particulate matter. I will launch unprecedented efforts to ensure existing facilities are fulfilling their permit responsibilities (working with MDE and EPA), including increasing publicly accessible fence-line monitoring data. I will also invest heavily in the remediation of brownfield sites to reduce rates of cancer and other illnesses.

In addition to much greater public input into land use decisions and more stringent facility standards/pollution controls, the long-term solutions involve a rapid transition to clean energy, electric vehicles/alternative transportation, reforestation, etc.

14. The BRESCO trash incinerator owned by WIN Waste burns Baltimore City and Baltimore County’s trash in South Baltimore, emitting significant greenhouse gasses and health-harming local air pollution. Baltimore City is currently under contract to send waste to the incinerator through 2031. In your term in office, will you support programs and initiatives to develop alternative methods of waste disposal and end trash incineration in Baltimore as soon as possible? Are there specific policies you would like to enact to develop this infrastructure and/or shut down the incinerator no later than the end of the current contract in 2031?

# Yes or No: Yes

The visual of Baltimore simply cannot be a smokestack with the City’s name emblazoned on it. No strategy that depends upon alone “starving the beast,” as suggested in the Sustainability Plan, will ever work, because the loss of city trash will just be displaced by trash from other communities. We need an entirely new approach to shutting it down for good. The fact that this facility is not required to disclose its pollution levels through the Toxic Release Inventory is an absolute disgrace and an abuse of a massive loophole. My pledge to shut down the incinerator within my first terms depends on four strategies:

1. Represent to Wheelabrator and its parent that the City is prepared to break the contract the previous Mayor had minted and proceed to litigation if the company does not voluntarily agree to having first-right-of-refusal on a city contract to build a mixedwaste materials recovery facility to replace the incinerator.

1. If that offer is not sufficiently tempting, the City will nullify the contract and proceed to litigation, arguing that the invalidation of the Baltimore Clean Air Act was incorrect and should be appealed to the Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals, which is differently constituted today than it was when the City lost the earlier case in March 2020.

1. While that appeal is underway, I will work with our City Council to pass a new Baltimore Clean Air Act that will survive judicial scrutiny to require higher standards and continuous monitoring.

1. The City will also sue the MDE, the EPA, and the incinerators for failing to enforce pollution limits and other permit conditions.

# Energy

15. Natural gas is mostly methane gas, which is more than 80+ times potent as a greenhouse gas than carbon dioxide. There is a movement across the U.S. and within Maryland counties to require new construction to be all electric. Do you support transitioning from methane gas infrastructure to electric? Towards that end, do you support a law that will require new construction and significant renovation (>50% of new structural components or an increase of 50% of floor area) to be all electric, as in, no gas connections to new construction?

# Yes or No: Yes

I am committed to 100% clean energy by 2028—not just for city operations but for Baltimore as a whole. With the incredible resources and incentives from the Inflation Reduction Act, achieving 100% is entirely possible. We will place solar panels on rooftops, parking garages, landfills, and brownfields. We will lead the State in geothermal energy to reduce energy demand for heating and cooling. We will be a leading off-taker of offshore wind, ideally generated by component parts manufactured in Baltimore with local city labor. And we will lead the State in energy efficiency and conservation because the cleanest energy will always be the energy we do not use. Not only is it the right thing to do, it is also beneficial for Baltimore’s economy, the City’s fight against crime, and youth development. This effort would create thousands of well-paying careers in development, manufacturing, and deployment.

16. Electrification of heating and cooling systems and appliances promises to reduce long term costs for homeowners and reduce the incidence of asthma and other health issues as well as reducing green-house gas emissions. The US Inflation Reduction Act and the updated Maryland EmPOWER Act will offer substantial rebates to homeowners who transition to electric heating and cooling with heat pumps or mini-splits and/or electric stoves and other appliances.

1. How will you work to help lower-income residents to take advantage of these rebates and financial incentives for upgrading their homes?

The incentives from the IRA are incredible and make electrification of homes affordable for all Baltimoreans. I will engage all residential contractors and suppliers to ensure they know about the IRA’s programs and incentives, while waging a massive public relations campaign in partnership with MEA to ensure that all residents can take advantage of the programs. Even with the incentives, the greatest challenge facing many residents will be access to upfront capital, so I will set aside at least $50 million for a revolving loan fund that could pay for the upfront costs while being repaid by the savings, possibly through the PACE mechanism of repaying on property tax bills.

1. Will you require or incentivize significant renovation (>50% of new structural components or an increase of 50% of floor area) of all homes (including vacant) be retrofitted using electric heat pumps for heating, cooling, and hot water, and all electric appliances as part of their renovation?

# Yes or No: Yes

Moving to electric is the only responsible decision. What is not responsible is investing billions to reinforce gas infrastructure that will last a century. This is one of the main reasons I fought so hard to stop BGE from installing new high pressure gas pipelines. Not only will I support a requirement that all new construction and significant expansions have heat pumps and electric appliances; I would also join other jurisdictions like Montgomery County that prohibit new gas connections altogether, beginning in 2026. Between IRA incentives, state inducements, and city-financed loans, there is no reason for any property not to go electric.

**Preserving Biodiversity:**

17. Approximately one billion birds are killed annually, especially during spring and fall migration, when they hit windows. Would you support legislation to have new or significantly refurbished city and large commercial buildings use energy saving bird safe windows similar to legislation passed for Maryland government buildings?

# Yes or No: Yes

Perhaps after only Cape May, New Jersey, the State of Maryland boasts many of the most incredible birding spots on the Eastern Seaboard. The State sits along the Atlantic Flyway, one of the four major North American migratory flyways — and in the Chesapeake Bay watershed. Because Baltimore, along with New York, Philadelphia, and DC, have the largest concentration of large buildings along the migratory path, the City must take steps to ameliorate the dangers of urban structures that often bring a sad and abrupt stop to these birds’ migratory journeys.

No great innovation is needed for Baltimore to adopt laws requiring bird-safe windows.

San Francisco pioneered this sort of legislation when it first adopted Standards for BirdSafe Buildings in 2011. Both New York City and Washington, DC have recently passed comparable legislation. Baltimore should follow suit.

Specifically, I would vocally support legislation requiring buildings of a certain height, as well as all government buildings in Baltimore, to use bird-safe window glass.

18. There is growing awareness of the adverse impact of light pollution on wildlife. Would you support legislation to reduce light pollution (e.g. turning off lighting on unoccupied floors of buildings, using warmer bulbs, installing downward directing lighting) for commercial and government buildings in Baltimore as other cities like Pittsburgh.

# Yes or No: Yes

I wholeheartedly support legislation to reduce light pollution in our city. Light pollution not only disrupts the natural rhythms of wildlife but also affects human health and wellbeing. By implementing measures such as turning off lighting on unoccupied floors of buildings, using warmer bulbs, and installing downward directing lighting, we can significantly mitigate the adverse impacts of excessive artificial light.

Perhaps the most striking illustration of the current administration turning a blind eye to light pollution is the City’s agreement to convert downtown Baltimore into a Vegas strip by allowing massive electronic billboards for a meager $300K in annual fees.

Following the example of cities like Pittsburgh, we will work collaboratively with stakeholders to draft legislation that promotes responsible outdoor lighting practices while ensuring that safety and security concerns are addressed. This legislation will not only protect our environment but also enhance the quality of life for all Baltimore residents.

As Mayor, I will also reverse the decision to allow electronic billboards downtown, citing the strong opposition voiced by downtown residents and the lack of transparency and public discussion when the original decision was made.

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