

BPAC Questionnaire Response from Sandy Marks

1. Please describe your walking and biking experience in Alexandria.

As a kid, I grew up in a 100% car-dependent community without public transportation, and biking was purely for recreation. You'd either bike around your own residential neighborhood with friends or drive your bike to a place free of traffic to ride for recreation or sport.

Now I walk at least a few miles every day, through several neighborhoods, both for exercise and simple transportation. Walkability was in my top three priorities when considering where to make a home and raise my children. As an adult in a vibrant city like Alexandria, and a walkable neighborhood like mine, there is something in me that connects walking—yes for exercise, but also for daily care tasks—with the feeling of community, interacting with neighbors, shopping local, and being known.

Living in a place where my kids can walk to school, experience the independence of getting themselves to a part-time job or the public library, or even run down to the bus stop to take the DASH bus with friends is a dream come true.

I enjoy biking—my kids are mortified by my bike, by the way. For the most part, I borrow my teen's road bike if I need to ride into DC, or use Capital Bikeshare to get myself where I need to go more quickly than on foot. I also use it when I need to bridge the gap between other forms of transportation. And I have to tell you: every time I do, I wonder why I don't ride more often. Whenever I travel, the first thing I do is hop on a bike and orient myself with the city—when I hop on a Bikeshare bike, it feels the same. My first e-bike ride was actually through Capital Bikeshare, and by accident!

Another thing I appreciate about walking long distances in Alexandria, and biking to extend that range, is the experience of really seeing the individual personalities, amenities, and structural challenges of neighborhoods. Walking over sidewalks and biking and watching cars and commercial vehicles navigate roads and in different stages of wear, through communities with more or less biking and car traffic, really gives you a feel for the infrastructure needs and level of urgency that could be helpful context when reviewing data on road and infrastructure projects.

2. Do you feel safe when walking around Alexandria?

This is an interesting question with many layers and context. Mostly, yes—I feel pretty safe, aware that, in some ways, I am insulated from harm while walking around Alexandria during the day. Also, not always—my gender certainly affects my feeling of safety when walking in more isolated corridors and at night.

And I think that's the point. Personal and bodily safety is differently achievable for everyone, and varies by place, time of day, whether or not the paths are populated, and their general condition.

What we can do is make targeted improvements in corridors where traffic speed, missing transit connections, and difficult crossings and mobility obstacles put people in vulnerable situations—so that Alexandrians' safety isn't dependent on their zip code, age, or level of mobility. The goal should be consistency across the city.

a. What three measures do you think should be taken to improve pedestrian / bike safety?

First, we need to continue investing in infrastructure that slows traffic organically and clearly communicates expectations for everyone using the street. Protected bike lanes, safer crossings, curb extensions, and Complete Streets design all work because they change behavior without relying on constant enforcement.

Second, connectivity matters just as much as individual improvements. A great sidewalk or bike lane that suddenly disappears isn't just inconvenient. It can be unsafe, especially for new riders or families. Closing gaps, particularly along routes that connect neighborhoods to schools, parks, libraries, and transit, should be a priority.

Third, we should strengthen and expand the Safe Routes to School program. When families feel confident letting their kids walk or bike to school, it's a signal that the system is working. Prioritizing improvements on school routes, especially where younger kids and teens travel independently, is an effective way to teach future generations how to navigate the world without cars and improve safety citywide.

3. If speed cameras with automated ticketing are allowed, do you support speed cameras on streets such as Duke St., Seminary Rd., etc. (beyond school zones)?

Yes, when they are used thoughtfully, transparently, and the data directs it.

On major arteries where we know speeding causes crashes and serious safety issues, automated enforcement is one tool that can slow cars and prevent injuries. Corridors like Duke Street and Seminary function very differently from residential roads, and enforcement strategies should reflect that.

At the same time, how cameras are placed and communication about why really matters. Equitable placement, clear public information, and regular reporting are essential for the community to be able to trust that enforcement is about safety, and not revenue or anything else, and that equipment is used only for its agreed-upon purpose.

4. If you are elected, how will you champion investments in walking and biking infrastructure in Alexandria to improve safety and encourage active transportation?

I'd start by continuing and defending investments already underway, while also helping residents understand why these projects matter—not just for people who bike every day, but for kids, seniors, families, and anyone who wants safer, calmer streets.

Like many teens in 2026, my 17-year-old bikes everywhere and has put off driving because he feels more confident navigating Alexandria on a bike than behind the wheel. And in contrast, my younger son was hit by a slow-moving car in our neighborhood a few years ago—even though he did everything right, even though he was being careful, even though adults were nearby. That experience stays with you.

As a councilmember, I would continue supporting ongoing projects while pushing for a whole-city approach that looks at safety data, equity, and life experience together. Tools like heat maps and crash data are important, but they need to be paired with place-based listening, especially in neighborhoods that have historically been overlooked.

I also think we need to normalize talking about walking and biking as everyday, mainstream transportation. Whether that's through public communication, community conversations, or even

the Liberally Social podcast!, I want residents to see these investments as practical, family-friendly improvements that benefit everyone.

5. How much do you see the lack of a complete connected bike network as a barrier to more biking? How can we better connect the network?

I think it's one of the biggest barriers, especially for new or infrequent riders.

Alexandria has strong individual segments, but unpredictability is what keeps people from biking more—at least that's what stalls me. When a comfortable route suddenly disappears, merges into fast traffic, or requires a difficult crossing, families, seniors, and less experienced riders hop in the car.

The solution isn't reinventing the wheel! It's connecting what we already have. Priorities should include east-west connections, safe access to schools, and continuity through high-traffic commercial areas. Creating a continuous network that feels organic is what turns occasional riders into confident, regular ones.

6. The City is planning a Complete Streets project on Braddock Rd which requires trade offs between parking and capacity for drivers and safety for people walking and biking. If approved by the Traffic & Parking Board, there is a significant likelihood it will be appealed to the City Council. What are your views on this project?

Complete Streets projects always involve tradeoffs, and I'm already hearing a lot about them in relation to this project. Handicap parking access, convenience, safety, and neighborhood needs all matter, and they deserve consideration.

That said, keeping Alexandrians safe and alive has to be the primary goal. When data tells us that a corridor has speeding issues, crash history, or obstacles to people walking and biking, we have a responsibility to address that. When I meet with Rosemont neighbors this week, I'll share that view.

Change can sometimes be uncomfortable, but, in this case, the outcome will make the street safer and more inclusive for everyone. I'd like to see more families knowing they're safe enough to walk and bike down Braddock Road to GWMS, get to nearby restaurants and shops, and complete care tasks without the need for their car or parking.