

## Luciano Benjamin, Democrat for Harrisonburg City Council 2020

### **1) Do you support the 50x25 campaign?**

Yes absolutely!

### **2) How would you implement the 3 goals of the 50x25 campaign?**

To implement the first goal, 50% of our energy coming from renewable sources by 2025, of the 50 by 25 campaign I would commit to making sure that all of our new city buildings, schools included, are constructed with solar built-in. I would also push to retrofit all existing city municipal and school buildings with solar. Our current contract with Dominion stops us from buying energy from renewable sources or constructing our own municipal renewable energy plants. I would like for us to have a conversation as a community to determine whether or not we are willing to break the contract with Dominion so we could pursue constructing our own municipal solar farm and if we do so, how would we pay for the fine that would be incurred. I would also support a financing option, through loans and subsidies, to ensure that our working-class families have access to being able to put solar panels on their own homes, reducing their energy bills and our reliance on non-renewable energy.

To implement the second goal, 25% greater energy efficiency for city municipal and school buildings, I would begin by continuing to support the EPSAC recommendations for the city to create an Internal Energy Team to determine how we can operate to a higher standard in our city buildings and where improvements can be made. Following that, it is critical that we adopt the most recent edition of the International Energy Conservation Code, as per EPSAC recommendations, for our new buildings. We also must retrofit our existing city buildings to ensure that they meet these same standards. We as a city must also expand the Harrisonburg Electric Commission's (HEC) Home Energy Audit, so residents throughout our city can have

access to a free energy audit that will allow them to improve the energy efficiency of their homes, saving them money on their electric bill.

To implement the third goal, create programs that encourage weatherization and energy efficiency in residential and commercial buildings, I once again turn to expand the HEC's Home Energy Audit program so that residents throughout our city have free access to this critical service, on-demand. We must do more to make sure all of our residents are aware of this program as well, which means making sure it is available in multiple languages, at a minimum.

**3) What would you do to increase or facilitate the adoption of renewable energies or solar in City and School buildings?**

All new city/school buildings must be built with solar energy sources as a part of the design. We, as a city, must lead the way if we want our residents to also put solar panels on their own homes. All existing city/school buildings must also be retrofit with renewable energy sources.

**4) How would you prioritize city and state resources for addressing environmental justice concerns, specifically energy efficiency for low-income housing?**

All too often, working-class families struggle to participate in the environmental movement, not because they do not care, but because they lack the resources to make their homes energy-efficient or to power their homes with renewable sources, like solar. As a consequence, working-class families are often the most negatively affected by the climate crisis. As a city councilor, I will commit to making sure that the city makes available programs, like the HEC Home Energy Audit, to our working-class families first. To reiterate what I have previously said, I would also work to make sure working-class families have financing options available to

improve the energy efficiency of their homes and to put solar on them, through loans and subsidies.

**5) What do you think about recycling?**

I am absolutely in favor of recycling and I am thrilled our city still has a recycling program. We must do more to expand it, even in the face of difficulties of finding buyers for some of our recyclables. Our city is filled with brilliant and talented individuals, whose skills should be put to work to find creative, local solutions to deal with the issues we may have with some of our recyclables. I am also in favor of resuming curbside recycling pickup as soon as funding allows.

**6) Is there anything Harrisonburg can do to reduce transportation emissions, the largest sector of climate change emissions in VA and the United States?**

There are absolutely things that Harrisonburg can do to reduce transportation emissions in our city. Step one is creating the finest public transit system in the country. We must work to phase out our current bus fleet with buses that are powered by renewable sources, whether that be electricity, biofuel, etc. Whenever we, as a city, buy new vehicles for our public transit fleet we must make sure that they are built to a high standard and do not further contribute to transportation emissions in our city. We must also do more to make sure our public transit system works for all of our city residents, allowing them to travel from their jobs to their homes and to our commercial centers. We must every year determine how we can make our public transit systems operate most efficiently to the benefit of all our city residents. In addition to all this, we must continue to work to make our city pedestrian and bicycle-friendly, so that individuals feel comfortable and safe biking and walking to their school, job, home, etc. One

way I would accomplish this would be through the city creating more dedicated bike lanes. We must also create more pedestrian-only areas, to make our city more walkable.