



GSSCC Candidate Questionnaire
Montgomery County Council – At-Large

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Elected Office You are Seeking: Montgomery County Council At-Large

Legislative District: _____

Number of Years Lived in that District: _____

Party Affiliation: Democrat

Relevant Non-governmental Professional Experience/Positions Held: I worked as a reporter and editor at The Washington Post for 20 years, covering local news throughout the Washington area. Worked for 2 years for the Maryland State Superintendent of Schools. Worked for 6 years for the City of Rockville as its Public Information officer. Worked for 11 years for Montgomery County government (10 years for the County Council as its Legislative Information Officer and since July 2017, I have been working on special projects for the County's Public Information Office).

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1. GSSCC believes that a thriving business community brings prosperity for all of our citizens by increasing the number of good private sector jobs and expanding the tax base to support necessary public services.
- Please list all the initiatives/legislation you have supported/or would support to foster the growth of existing businesses and encourage new business creation.
 - Please describe your plan for increasing the tax base – rather than tax rates – in the County.
 - What is your plan for making Montgomery County more attractive to businesses looking to expand or relocate (i.e. increased tax incentives, subsidies, streamlining the development approval process)?

A county like Montgomery must continue to expand its business base to bring in new capital, new ideas and continually establish its identity beyond its borders. Our county took a great step in eliminating its Department of Economic Development and establishing the M.C. Economic Development Corporation, but so far, we still need to see if we have the right people and right game plan for that organization. In addition to major corporations, our economy needs to attract and retain medium and small businesses, and give them the support to grow. I sometimes worry that we spend too much time on worrying about the bigger targets—which cost more to attract and are a bigger gamble.

We must be patient in development and make sure our prime areas include a mix of business and residential components. I do not think Silver Spring has created a good mix of this, with too many prime locations being developed as residential. Over the long-term, this is not good.

I believe in building a strong economic development fund that will have the county positioned, and ready quickly, to act. We have constantly underfunded this commitment. It is all about spending the tax money we collect better. Economic development funding cannot be an optional funding item.

The county constantly says it is making the development process easier. Yet, my friends in the development community tell me Montgomery County is by far the worst jurisdiction in the Washington

area to deal with in this regard. I believe what they say and will work with the next administration to make it a priority to improve the process.

As for residents / employees: The major component of my campaign centers on that Montgomery County collects all the money it needs to implement new and innovative programs. But we do not have those programs because we do not spend the money we have wisely. As an insider to County Government for the past 11 years, I can say that we are sinking in waste. Several years ago, County voters approved a measure that allows one Councilmember to block an increase in property taxes above the County Charter Limit (basically the rate of inflation). I will use that measure to GUARANTEE for four years that property taxes do not increase above the Charter Limit. This will make our county more attractive to companies and their employees—especially after our nearby, competitive county, Fairfax, is trying to again increase property taxes this year.

2. Montgomery County leaders have continued to approve increases in the County's operating budget that require spending at levels exceeding private sector growth. GSSCC believes the County government needs to do a better job of living within its means. This is even more important given the recent announcement of a \$120 million revenue shortfall for the current fiscal year.
 - Did you or would you have supported the 2016 property tax increase?
 - Absolutely not. This was not needed. Taxes went up 8.7 percent and no one can say where that money went. The Council had a choice to do some hard work and make the budget tighter—or to simply do nothing and raise taxes. The Councilmembers chose the latter—and hoped no one would notice.
 - Did you or would you have supported the 2016 recordation tax increase?
 - This also was not necessary. The Council figured it might as well raise taxes twice in one year (a non-election year) and hope no one noticed. But six months after it passed the budget, county voters, by a 70-30 percent overwhelming margin, voted in term limits for elected officials. Voters did notice the tax increases—and this was their opportunity to express their unhappiness with the way the County is being run. In fact, the Council promised the recordation tax revenues would be used to support school construction, but in Spring 2017, with little fanfare, it took \$2.1 million dollars from the recordation tax fund and used it to pay outside legal fees regarding the Silver Spring Transit Center. I do not think we will see a new school built on top of the Transit Center.
 - Did you or would you have supported the eventual phase out of the County's exorbitant energy tax?
 - The County Executive and the Council flatly lied about their commitment regarding the INCREASE in the energy tax. They doubled the energy tax during the hard times during the Great Recession and promised it would be for only two years. The County Executive simply ignored his promise. They Council enacted three years of partial reductions in the increase and then just stepped away from the issue. Since it is now so solidly built into the structure of the operating budget, it will require gradually changes annually to reduce the increase, but I would lead the effort to do that.
 - Other than raising taxes, what ideas do you have for creating an economy that will meet the growing needs of county residents?
 - We do not need to raise property taxes for the next four years. We need to attract new businesses and jobs in the areas of the county that can support them. The vacancy rate of commercial businesses in our county is horrible for a county of our stature. We need to aggressively recruit the right sized businesses to fit our availability and current infrastructure. Most of all, we need to address the huge waste in our county budget because, if better allocated, funds would help pay for so many current and future innovative programs without putting the burden on taxpayers or employees.

- Would you support consolidation of some County Government functions in order to reduce costs? If so, please describe which programs or services you would recommend be consolidated, reduced, or eliminated.
 - We need to eliminate positions of grandeur such as Director of Innovation and Cable Administrator. With salary and benefits and support staff, that would save \$500,000 right there (those positions have been vacant since last summer—has anyone noticed a problem?). There are endless positions like that in County Government that need to be eliminated.
 - Our Department of General Services has been hurting our county for the past 11 years. The Silver Spring Transit Center is such a prime example. Not only did it have endless cost overruns, its final “gift” was \$60 million in construction corrections. The County Executive promised we would get “Every penny” of that money back. We settled to accept only \$20 million back. This cost us an additional \$40 million. We would have been well on the way to building an elementary school with money like that. This department needs a total overhaul.
- Other comments:

3. In recent years, our members have faced an increasing number of federal, state, and expanded local regulations that directly impact their ability to remain viable.

- Did you or would you have supported the additional increase to the Montgomery County minimum wage to \$15 by 2020?
 - I think the compromise legislation that the Council eventually adopted on the \$15 minimum wage was a good solution on a difficult issue.
- Did you or would you have supported mandatory sick leave, even for part-time employees?
 - I support mandatory sick leave for all employees. However, this county needs to take a major step in solidifying its definition of a “small business.” We change the definition of this for each separate piece of legislation. The elected officials laugh about this dilemma—and then do nothing to address it.
- Do you support an employer’s right to hire and schedule its employees according to its individual needs?
 - Employers should run their businesses.
- Do you support legislation that dictates minimum work hours or scheduling requirements?
 - No.
- What policy ideas do you have to enhance the success of our member job-creators?
 - What I feel should be mandatory rules, and what I feel are best practices rules, are different. I look at a company like Costco that pays well above the minimum wage—with good benefits and advancement opportunities—and it runs a smooth, highly profitable operation with many employees who stay with the company. Retaining workers, and not needing to constantly retrain the work force, is the best way to have a great company.
- Other comments:

4. Prior to considering any legislation, the County Council seeks a Fiscal Impact Statement to determine the impact of that legislation on the County’s budget.

- Would you support a law that requires the same kind of analysis to determine the fiscal economic impact on businesses and non-profits, prior to consideration and enactment of any new law or regulation?
 - I have worked inside our government for 11 years. I am familiar with the way the fiscal impact statement has worked. Sometimes not enough attention is paid and numbers are just provided to keep the legislative process moving. Some of this is due to the lack of workforce to properly address this. To take it further and require an impact statement for local businesses and nonprofits would be a wonderful luxury—but not a fiscal reality. It would add too much cost onto every project. However, I would support

informal surveys of impacted business owners for opinions and insights—not necessarily to produce a dollar figure of impact.

- Would you require that this analysis include interviews and discussions with actual business owners?
- Why or why not?
 - See previous answer.

5. Many of our small- and medium-sized business members feel that the policies adopted most recently by County government reflect a lack of appreciation for the contributions they make to our community. Please describe your understanding of the difference between the challenges faced by large multinational companies and small locally owned/operated businesses. Provide three specific examples of how you will support small businesses and ensure opportunities for them to grow and expand.
 - The best thing we can do for small businesses is to help them understand the rules and regulations of the government with which they must deal. The County Office of Small Business Navigator is a good start, but is greatly undermanned. I would allocate more professionally trained people for this office.
 - I would allocate money to establish an office like the organization once known as SCORE, with retired executives volunteering to help businesses. We have so many great, smart people living in this county that would love to help businesses—if we made the connections easy.
 - Our County Government needs for itself to look at the retired work force available right here for its own use. Without debating the merits of retaining or eliminating the Department of Liquor Control, I know from careful study that this department has been transforming from a total mess to a much better operation because the County replaced a longtime, inept department head with a retired Marriott executive who spent his whole career in food and beverage service. How great it would be to have other department heads with representative backgrounds of experience.
6. The Silver Spring Central Business District was envisioned to become a smart-growth live/work/play community. However, in recent years, Silver Spring has evolved into a primarily residential neighborhood (bedroom community), with virtually no commercial office development in the past 10 years. Local retailers and restaurants are feeling the brunt of having fewer and fewer customers during office hours. What will you do to address this and help bring more businesses back to Silver Spring?
 - In my current job of overseeing special county government projects in Wheaton and Silver Spring, I have had much better fortune trying to organize the Wheaton businesses, nonprofits and civic groups to work together. I have had less success in Silver Spring—but saw the potential. A position should be reallocated and assigned to the mission of coordinating all events in Silver Spring and promoting them as one overall vibrant urban area. Right now, to find the events being staged by the more than 30 active organizations in Silver Spring requires going to 30 different web sites. The well-meaning people who are in charge of each operation do not realize how much they are hurting the image of Silver Spring by failing to work together. Silver Spring has so much more to offer than a place like Downtown Frederick, yet little Frederick does so much of a better job promoting what it has and organizing events that attract new people. Silver Spring can do the same. I want that to happen.
7. The Route 29 Corridor in Eastern Montgomery County has suffered from a lack of commercial and other development for many years. Traffic congestion has increased, and most of it is through traffic to the Beltway or Downtown D.C. Few, if any new employment opportunities have been created to provide jobs that would take these cars off the road. What are you going to do to ensure economic development that brings new businesses to Silver Spring including downtown and the East County/Rt. 29 Corridor?
 - The Council has irresponsibly approved new development for the East County and Route 29. The Council approved plans without guaranteeing that infrastructure for

roads, transit and schools would be part of the plan. The Council literally said: Start building and we will figure out the rest later. Later? What does that mean? Later—as when they are no longer on the Council?

- The “Better BRT” plan might work, but the original BRT plan for Route 29 can never work. And even the Better BRT plan can only work if we have parking spaces close to some of the major stops. Without that, many people who want to use transit—but who cannot get to it from their homes without using their cars for short distances—will not use the transit if they do not have places to park their cars. There are opportunities to make some of this work in REAL WORLD scenario.

8. The Chamber supports a balanced approach to transportation policies that take into account the needs of our member businesses, their employees, their customers, and their vendors. That balance must accommodate those who use public transit, drive on our roads, travel by bicycle and on foot, and need sufficient parking options at their destination.

- Please describe your approach to finding the right balance of transit, roads, parking, and other transportation options.
 - I will never vote for a development plan that does not include sufficient transit, additional road lanes when needed, a realistic plan for school capacity and parking spaces (this county still loves its cars and we are a long way from thinking otherwise). The plans the County Council have approved in the past 10 years without realistic infrastructure are going to drag our County down in a large degree over the next 10 years. I consider it criminal what they have approved.
- How will you assure the future success of the Metro?
Plain and simple: We need dedicated funding for Metro. Some of this must be placed upon Metro users and some would be placed on drivers in the form of a SLIGHT increase in the gas tax. This combination would create Maryland’s fair share annually.
- What will you do to address the needs and concerns of businesses that expect to be harmed financially during the construction of The Purple Line?
 - I am working on a special project in Wheaton and I have seen how its downtown revitalization has impacted businesses in the immediate area. I have learned how the businesses along the Purple Line can be helped—but things must be in place long before the real construction begins. In Wheaton, they put things in place literally after the start of construction and never caught up. The needs include an expansion of the Small Business Assistance Program to provide reimbursements for some losses of revenue, business advocates to help existing businesses adjust to the new (and future) conditions and marketing staff (with a marketing budget) to promote the businesses while construction is all around them.

9. What is your vision for the future of greater Silver Spring and Montgomery County over the next 5 years?

- It is my hope that Greater Silver Spring businesses are more willing to align themselves and create a stronger business community through a combined marketing effort. The possibilities are in place, but the area has grown up with too many individual concerns that have not been willing to work cooperatively. I think this must change for a better Silver Spring. County government assistance may be a great addition to an area that already has great assets.
- The County is going to struggle over the next few years in building to its future. The irresponsible master plans approved by the Council for areas throughout the County are going to start squeezing our wonderful assets. I hope a new council and county executive will work with our current business community, and other businesses who want to be part of it, to move better—and smarter.

10. If elected, how will you measure your success at the end of your term?

- If elected, I think our entire county will greatly benefit by being more efficient and doing it without a property tax increase for four years.
- I want to see new lanes of road built—local lanes—to take the pressure off our current and future overcrowding.
- I want to see a major culture change in our school system. We spent 16 years under two superintendents who only cared about increasing test scores. Under Dr. Smith—who I have great faith in—we are now ready to start introducing innovative courses that will make students at all levels want to learn and come to school. But the new courses are being introduced in very small doses at selected schools. Significantly increasing this movement can invigorate a school system which still needs to be a gem of our county.