



GSSCC Candidate Questionnaire **County Executive & County Council**

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

Legislative District: At-Large

Number of Years Lived in that District: 28 years

Party Affiliation: Democrat

Relevant Non-Governmental Professional Experience/Positions Held: Manager: Sales and Customer Relations, Jain Sales, Inc., January 2005-February 2014

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)?

One of my top three priorities is to strengthen our local economy. This includes being mindful of actions taken by our businesses and ensuring we are doing everything we can to support our business owners and our residents.

My family immigrated to this country with limited resources, and eventually started their own business in Montgomery County. I understand the struggles that small and minority-owned businesses face - given the lack of capital needed to start or expand their business, the difficulty in accessing county resources for small business owners, the duplications in completing license and registrations between the state and county governments, the challenges in attracting new customers, and the fear of losing existing customers when needed county development projects result in short-term displacement.

As such:

1. *I support smart growth that favors mixed-use development and creates inclusive communities with access to affordable housing, transit, education and employment opportunities. This ensures that we expand our economic tax base without pricing anyone out of our cities, and also helps increase foot traffic and retail support for our local businesses.*
2. *We also need more job training and career development programs -- like the ones provided by Workforce Montgomery and Montgomery College -- which will diversify our workforce, help businesses and non-profits find the skilled workers they need, and provide more career and professional development opportunities for our young entrepreneurs and professionals. Through my work in President Obama's Office of Presidential Personnel, I was tasked with diversifying the political appointee workforce and creating a career readiness and mentorship program for over 100 newly appointed recent college graduates. I understand the importance of creating and implementing these programs for our county.*
3. *We must assist those small businesses who might face short-term displacement by new and upcoming development projects, like the Purple Line. Specifically, we must provide these businesses with assistance to find affordable rental spaces (through county programs like MOVE), better notifications on upcoming projects/closures and assist them with relocation and marketing to current customers (working with organizations like the Economic Development Corporation).*

4. *We must also create new Enterprise Zones, where we reduce or waive specific business, corporate, sales, property and/or income taxes for eligible small and mid-size tech startups (particularly those in biomedical sciences, IT, cybersecurity) for their first 5-7 years of moving to Montgomery County.*
5. *We must streamline the licensing and permitting process. Some of the licenses between the state of Maryland and Montgomery County overlap. As such, we should create a system where, if the business owner already went through the licensing process and obtained one from the state, they should not need to duplicate their application to get a license in the county.*
6. *Geographically, our county lies in a unique location that allows for unparalleled access to federal agencies, laboratories, world-class universities, startups and talent. As such, our goal should be to leverage those advantages to create a robust business climate that will allow Montgomery County to lead the way in science and technology entrepreneurship, business and innovation. As such, we must also make use of vacant office spaces throughout our county and create more shared working spaces (like WeWork in D.C.) to make finding an office space more affordable and collaborative.*

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?
- Did you or would you have supported the 2016 recordation tax increase?
- Did you or would you have supported the eventual phase out of the County's exorbitant energy tax?
- Other than raising taxes, what ideas do you have for creating an economy that will meet the growing needs of county residents?
- 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.
- Other comments:

Last year, our residents faced an 8.7% increase in property taxes - one of the highest increases in recent years. While most of our residents often notice the direct and positive correlation between their increased taxes and the services our county provides, many are currently frustrated and concerned. Despite this recent tax increase, we still find ourselves to have a \$120 million budget shortfall.

While this shortfall was caused by less than expected income tax revenue (likely from wealthy families not selling their capital assets until they understand the implications of the GOP tax bill), less than expected revenue from the increase in the recordation tax (from .69% to .89% for the first \$500,000 of the purchasing price of a seller's home), a loss of \$30 million a year from the Wynn lawsuit, and increase in expenditures (with projects like the BRT and school investments to manage the 3,000 new students who entered our system just last year), parents are finding that the Council recently voted to slash \$25 million from the MCPS budget and residents are nervously awaiting the 2% in proposed cuts to county services the County Executive has suggested.

We must be mindful of how we balance this budget while not cutting essential services and critical programs that people come to this county for. While we should not take raising and lowering taxes off the table as valid strategies, we cannot simply tax our way out of our problems. Any long-term solution must include the retention and expansion of our tax base to strengthen our local economy.

We have an increasing number of older residents who are retiring. These residents are a key element of our county's success; often, they have lived the majority of their lives here, raising children and investing years in the county we all call home. As such, I would encourage zoning that would include and/or allow a variety of affordable multi-unit, multi-income developments such as apartments, accessory-dwelling, and cohousing. This would allow our older citizens who wish to move out of single family homes to continue to live in the communities they have spent the majority of their life, as well as allow newer residents to gain a foothold into our communities.

At the same time, we must do more to attract new families to work and live in our county. I outlined some possible solutions in the previous answer.

As the former Deputy White House Liaison at the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, under the leadership of President Obama and Secretary Julián Castro, I worked to build a team which helped increase access to affordable housing for our nation's most vulnerable populations. I understand the importance of not pricing anyone out of living in our cities and supporting those (like our senior residents) who have spent their lives contributing to our communities.

By creating vibrant communities that are attractive and affordable for both older residents and newcomers, Montgomery County can truly expand the tax base, thereby lessening the tax burden on all and strengthening our local economy.

As it relates to the energy tax, I understand that it is one of our county's largest sources of revenue. That being said, I am open to structuring the tax in such a way to alleviate some of the immediate, short-term costs it places on small businesses. This relief could also encourage new businesses to move to and stay in Montgomery County, thus providing a larger tax base of employees, families and jobs.

Finally, I am also committed to prudent fiscal management and maintaining our AAA bond rating. My family's experience has taught me that investments by federal, state and local governments make a huge difference in not only individuals but whole communities and we should not pursue any plan that jeopardizes essential services and programs upon which our residents depend. By maintaining our AAA bond rating, our county can keep our borrowing costs low, thus allowing us the ability to borrow money to finance the investments needed for our residents.

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?
 - Did you or would you have supported mandatory sick leave, even for part-time employees?
 - Do you support an employer's right to hire and schedule its employees according to its individual needs? Do you support legislation that dictates minimum work hours or scheduling requirements?
 - What policy ideas do you have to enhance the success of our member job-creators?
 - Other comments:

I believe there is a false dichotomy that what is good for our workers is not good for our business owners.

My parents started their business in Montgomery County. And I've learned from them that great businesses are made by great employees who feel invested in the company. After all, when employees feel invested in, a business suffers less costly employee turnover and increased employee retention and productivity.

This is also why I, as the son of small business owners, strongly supported raising the minimum wage in Montgomery County to \$15. I also testified in support of the bill at a Council meeting (<http://bit.ly/2AxAw3Q>). I believe anyone who works in Montgomery County should also be able to afford to live in Montgomery County. Providing a fair and living wage is an essential component of that belief.

Speaking with small business owners around this county, I have also learned that they want to create an environment where their employees are being treated fairly and are able to achieve a healthy balance between their work and their personal lives. When employees - just like employers - don't have access to their schedules in advance, it casts a shadow of uncertainty over how they will make plans for themselves and their loved ones. This, in turn, will adversely affect their work performance. Therefore, I support the idea of notifying workers of their work schedules well in advance. We plan our schedules in every other aspect of our lives. The workplace should be no different.

Finally, one of my goals, if I have the privilege to be elected to the Montgomery County Council, is to ensure all our county's residents have financial security and access to healthcare they can easily afford. This is not simply the right thing to do, but it makes economic sense and strengthens our local economy. Given that full-time employees have greater access to healthcare and economic stability than part-time employees, I will work in partnership with our business community and encourage them to prioritize full-time employment.

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

Yes - Through my work with President Obama in his White House and on his campaigns in Montgomery County, I have learned the importance of engaging and empowering communities all over our county. After all, building meaningful relationships and coalitions is the key to governing. As such, I am a strong believer in ensuring that all key stakeholders have a seat at the table in every important policy and budgetary decision - especially those that deal with education reform.

As such, I am fully committed to being a reliable and trustworthy partner who will try my best to support and respect the hard work our business and non-profit community do to build a successful and prosperous county. These are my family members, my friends, my neighbors and my colleagues.

We must also ensure we devote more resources for detailed and accurate analysis for every new law and regulation to truly determine the fiscal economic impact on our residents.

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.

In addition to the 6 specific proposals I outlined in question one, I believe we must also:

1. *Invest in our education system, because employers - just like employees - want to move to an area where they have confidence that their children will be provided the best and high-quality education.*
 - a. *This means making Universal Pre-K a reality for all our children, as studies have shown how those who attend a high-quality preschool program are much more likely to graduate high school.*
 - i. *Currently, only 70% of our 4-year-old children are enrolled in pre-k, but it's increasingly difficult for those living in low-income and diverse neighborhoods to get equal access to these programs. Furthermore, children with parents who speak another language have been less likely to enroll, thus creating a lag in kindergarten readiness and an increase in the opportunity gap. As such, we must expand funding to create new programs.*
 - b. *This means expanding language immersion programs so that all children, regardless of their first language, can fully take advantage of Montgomery County's educational system.*
 - i. *Currently, we are finding that ESOL students and those who come from immigrant households feel isolated. Therefore, we need to create and expand language immersion programs to break down barriers to access, further integrate our schools, and build a greater sense of community. This includes expanding beyond the traditional model of ESOL-specific courses, as well as creating two-way immersion programs, which alternate a student's school day between English and Spanish (half the day in Spanish, the other half-day in English).*
2. *Invest in the safety of our residents, because employers - just like employees - want to stay in an area where they feel stable and secure.*
 - a. *We must have the political will to finally declare Montgomery County an official sanctuary county by passing a community trust ordinance. Our local law enforcement should not proactively work with ICE, especially as the federal government continues to inhumanely target minority populations. By making our county an official sanctuary county, we are not only standing up for our values in a time where our federal government is doing the opposite, but we're also making it easier for our local law enforcement to do their jobs.*
3. *Support a comprehensive transit and road infrastructure plan that reduces congestion, reduces pollution, and provides greater accessibility and connectivity for all employers and employees throughout the county.*
 - a. *I have provided more specifics in Question 8*

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?

As noted earlier, I am a strong supporter of smart growth with mixed-use development. We must create more walkable communities where residents have access to live, work and play.

Recently, we lost Discovery from downtown Silver Spring. This is certainly a huge loss. The company not only helped lead the revitalization of downtown Silver Spring, but also created opportunities for new restaurants and supportive retail to open in the area. Through my conversations with several of these small business owners, I understand the fear they have about the loss of foot traffic and revenue.

This is a chance for Montgomery County to incentivize and encourage more businesses -- small, medium and large -- to stay in Montgomery County or relocate here. If Amazon were to make Montgomery County home to its second U.S. headquarters, for example, we could see as many as 50,000 new jobs created and hundreds of millions of new dollars pumped back into our local economy -- a possibility I've been [talking about since October](#).

But the solution doesn't lie in simply trading one large corporate employer for another. As good stewards of our county, we must balance corporate incentives and our support for small businesses. Offering huge incentives can harm the economic stability of the county if used disproportionately. Not only does the impact of those incentives pose real risk for smaller businesses hoping to compete, it sends the message that these corporations are a more valuable mechanism to improve the lives of people living in our county, which simply isn't true.

There is huge value in supporting small, local businesses -- which I know firsthand from the experiences of my own family building our American dream in Montgomery County.

For specific proposals on how to encourage companies to move to Silver Spring or support those who are currently located in Silver Spring, please look at my proposals in questions 1 and 5.

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?

As I have noted in previous answers, we need a comprehensive approach to retaining and expanding our tax base, encourage smart growth through mixed-use development, support a comprehensive transportation infrastructure plan, provide more professional development and training opportunities, and assist small business owners during development.

Furthermore, we must make it more affordable for residents, employees and employers to live in Montgomery County. This need will be exacerbated as the county is on the verge of some dynamic growth and development, which could potentially further the deficit of affordable housing.

I also intend to leverage federal institutions (such as the FDA and the NIH) present in the county to forge crucial partnerships that will lead to the creation of new, high-paying jobs throughout the Greater Silver Spring area.

Finally, I hope to be able to work with organizations like Worksource Montgomery, Montgomery College and the Economic Development Corporation to attract new entrepreneurs to start companies in Silver Spring and throughout the county, develop a diverse workforce, and create more shared office spaces to replicate the collaborative and innovative tech incubators in D.C.

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.
 - How will you assure the future success of the Metro?
 - 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 support a comprehensive transit and road infrastructure plan.

This means understanding the needs of residents in DownCounty - who have incredible difficulty traveling from Bethesda to Silver Spring without driving or taking an hour-long trip through D.C. on the Red Line. As such, I support the Purple Line, Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) and creating more designated and protected bike lanes and sidewalks. But I believe any plan must take into serious consideration the concerns and short-term needs of the residents and business owners in the surrounding areas, as well as provide these groups with ample notification of upcoming development projects and closures.

This also means understanding the needs of residents in UpCounty - who live in less densely populated areas, currently unconnected through public transit and almost wholly dependent on the over-congested I-270. These communities face different transportation needs, thus require different solutions. For these residents and business owners, I understand the frustration they feel after the county created a Master Plan for the area, encouraged the growth of housing, businesses and schools, but did not fulfill its promise of the required transportation infrastructure. Therefore, I believe that it is necessary to invest in the CCT (Corridor Cities Transitway which connects Clarksburg to Shady Grove), as well as a limited expansion of roadways - like M-83 (which connects Germantown and Gaithersburg)- which provide alternate corridors for traffic and transit alike. I also believe that any real plan for expanding I-270 must include a thorough examination of public transit options, including but not limited to designated lanes exclusively for BRT buses, high occupancy vehicles, and/or hybrid and electric cars that allow individuals making more environmentally friendly choices to move through traffic.

Finally, we must make Metro more accessible. Unfortunately, Metro has long-term infrastructure development needs, that have worsened because of deferred maintenance. We are one of the few jurisdictions in the county that does not already provide dedicated funding sources for our metro system (instead, relying entirely on annual state, local and federal investments). Furthermore, WMATA has stated that the metro system is reporting more than \$25 billion in unfunded capital needs.

We must invest in transit, and we must invest in Metro. However, this is not just a Montgomery County issue, but a statewide issue, as well. As such, we not only need dedicated funding for WMATA, but also need to fight for additional funding from our state government in Annapolis. I believe the current proposal by Delegate Marc Korman, Delegate Erik Barron and State Senator Brian Feldman helps us move forward in the right direction by sharing costs between Maryland, Virginia and D.C. The bill also correctly requires that two specific benchmarks must first be met: first, that Governor Hogan continue the state's current contributions to Metro's capital budget; and second, that the state diverts an additional \$125 million per year from the state's transportation trust fund to Metro if Virginia and D.C. commit to providing the same amount. Through these two benchmarks, we can avoid tax increases because the money would flow from the trust fund.

We must also support Democratic candidates for Maryland Governor who understand that, while Montgomery County is one of the largest contributors to the overall budget of the state, we do not always receive proportional funding for our educational and transportation needs. As such, we must have a partner in Annapolis who will advocate for an equal proportion of funds from the state's budget.

And as it relates to the Purple Line, as listed in question 1, we must assist those small businesses who might face short-term displacement by new and upcoming development projects, like the Purple Line. Specifically, we must provide these businesses with assistance to find affordable rental spaces (through county programs like MOVE), better notifications on upcoming projects/closures and assist them with relocation and marketing to current customers (working with organizations like the Economic Development Corporation).

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

Over the course of the next 5 years, I hope to attract more small and minority-owned businesses and expand economic opportunities to all residents within Montgomery County. I will work as a partner with our business community and ensure we are making the necessary investments in our employers and employees, alike. I will also pursue strategies as I have outlined in question 7.

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

If I have the honor of being elected, I would measure success in terms of my ability to reduce our county's opportunity gap, strengthen our local economy, reduce traffic congestion, and engage more people in our political process.

After all, I love Montgomery County and am blessed to call it my home. This is where my parents immigrated to start our family and launch our family business. I've lived in 4 of the 5 council districts, in both the east and west sides of the county, and in Up and Down County. I was born in Rockville and grew up in Gaithersburg, Silver Spring, Wheaton and Potomac - and never left this county because it's home to my American Dream. I want to ensure that every resident of our county has the same access to that American Dream.

Through my work with President Obama in his White House and on his campaigns, I've engaged and empowered communities here in Montgomery County for the last 10 years. And I've seen how much good can come from politics. I ran efforts to increase the diversity in our government, get people access to affordable housing and affordable healthcare, and build grassroots support for NIH resulting in billions of dollars for cancer research.

I now want to bring that same level of commitment to the community I was born and raised in by making our elected institutions more representative, responsive, inclusive and accountable. And as someone who has lived in the county at-large and organized the county at-large, I understand how to do just that.