



GSSCC Candidate Questionnaire
County Executive & County Council

Name: George Leventhal
Email Address: George@GeorgeLeventhal.com
Web Address: www.georgeleventhal.com
Elected Office You are Seeking: County Executive
Legislative District: n/a
Number of Years Lived in that District: 45
Party Affiliation: Democrat

Relevant Non-governmental Professional Experience/Positions Held: Chairman, Montgomery County Democratic Central Committee, 1996-2001; Senior Federal Relations Officer, Association of American Universities, 1995-2002. My wife, Soraia Leventhal, has managed a small business (a family day care center) in our home since 1998.

Commented [1]:

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

I originated the Local Small Business Reserve, which was responsible for \$93 million in county purchases from local small businesses in 2017. I have also strongly supported programs to ensure a fair share of county procurement for minority, female and disabled-owned businesses (\$218 million in 2017).

I supported the creation of the Small Business Navigator and Business Solutions Group, and will establish a Small, Minority, Female and Disabled-owned Business Advisory Committee if elected County Executive.

I have sponsored meetings of minority-owned businesses to help them understand how to win contracts from Montgomery County.

I supported privatizing the Department of Economic Development, transforming it into the Montgomery County Economic Development Corporation, led by the business community.

I co-founded Bethesda Green, which hosts the BeGreen Hub, an environmental jobs incubator, and have supported establishment of other industry-specific incubators.

I supported the Biotechnology, Green Investor and Cybersecurity Tax Credits.

I am currently sponsoring a matching grant for biotech businesses that receive NIH Small Business Innovative Research (SBIR) and Small Business Technology Transfer (STTR) grants.

On February 28, 2018, I hosted a successful forum on how Montgomery County can foster a healthy climate for biotech and life sciences.

I will seek to reduce our county energy tax, which puts our high-tech and data-intensive businesses at a particular disadvantage.

- Please describe your plan for increasing the tax base – rather than tax rates – in the County.

As County Executive, I will engage in proactive, hands on outreach to employers, both within the county and in other areas where they may be planning to expand or relocate. I will personally, and vocally, market Montgomery County as a great place for business.

Amazon's decision to include Montgomery County in the second round of prospects for its second headquarters is a very good sign. It demonstrates that our county's business climate is strong, our quality of life is high, and our workforce is very appealing to employers.

In addition to Amazon, other high-profile business location decisions recently have included decisions by Marriott, Booz Allen Hamilton and Host Hotels to keep their headquarters in the county, and WTTG/Fox 5's decision to relocate to Bethesda from Northwest Washington. Of course, Discovery's impending departure from Silver Spring is disappointing, but our goal should be that our county's economy is large enough and diverse enough that we can take a loss, and offset it with gains elsewhere.

Montgomery County has a great story to tell, but we need to do a better job telling it. Our quality of life is high; we have great public schools; honest and effective government; excellent cultural and recreational opportunities; beautiful natural features; proximity to airports, shipping routes, interstate highways and public transportation; high family incomes; a low crime rate, and a low unemployment rate. I supported creating the new Montgomery County Economic Development Corporation and am glad to see it is investing more than ever before in marketing our county's excellent attributes to grow our job base and retain existing employers. Its success in marketing the county to Amazon is especially impressive.

But MCEDC cannot do the job alone. The County Executive must also repeatedly tell our story. We should market ourselves as the International Gateway to the Nation's Capital, emphasizing our skilled workforce and its ability to do businesses with companies from around the globe, in their own languages.

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- 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)?

I have supported economic incentives, including tax breaks and subsidies for companies on a case-by-case basis, such as for Marriott. I agree that the development and permitting processes should be streamlined and made more customer-friendly, and I will strive to achieve this as County Executive.

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?
Yes, the County Council passed this unanimously, but I will not support further property tax increases during the four-year term beginning in 2018.
- Did you or would you have supported the 2016 recordation tax increase?
Yes, the County Council passed this unanimously, but I am not seeking further increases from this revenue source.
- Did you or would you have supported the eventual phase out of the County's exorbitant energy tax?

I supported the reductions in the energy tax in 2012, 2013 and 2014. I voted in favor of a further reduction in 2015, but was in the minority on a 5-4 vote. I will look for opportunities to reduce the energy tax further in the future.

- Other than raising taxes, what ideas do you have for creating an economy that will meet the growing needs of county residents?
See answers to question 1.

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- 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.

I will work diligently with the Office of Management and Budget, and with every department, to find savings and process improvements if I am elected to lead this government. I understand the mission of every county department. I have low tolerance for redundancy. I am prepared to prioritize, and to say no to additional spending where saying no is warranted. One place we could start is by looking at how the county provides health care to its employees.

Montgomery County will spend \$245 million in FY2018 on employee health coverage. In 2011, I commissioned a Task Force on Employee Wellness and Agency Consolidation, which recommended adoption of an employee wellness program. It took the Leggett administration until 2015 to get the program fully up and running. Between 2017 and 2018, health claims dropped by \$3 million, although it is not clear this is statistically significant, or directly caused by participation in employee wellness programs. I am confident that continued implementation of employee wellness efforts will lead to continued reduction in utilization of health benefits, and increased savings.

The task force also recommended consolidating procurement of employee health coverage between county government, the school system and Montgomery College. The school system and the college have declined to adopt this recommendation. School employee unions feared their members might lose their more favorable benefits. However, the county's Office of Human Resources already administers health benefits among different bargaining units, and could easily administer health benefits for school system and college employees, resulting in substantial overhead savings, and savings from group purchasing. I will continue to advocate for unified administration of health benefits among all three agencies.

Additional overhead savings, and efficiencies from volume purchasing, could also be achieved by consolidating procurement of all goods and services for county government, MCPS and Montgomery College in a single office.

- 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?
Yes, the County Council passed it unanimously.
 - Did you or would you have supported mandatory sick leave, even for part-time employees?
Yes.
 - Do you support an employer's right to hire and schedule its employees according to its individual needs?

This is a very broad statement. Employment arrangements are negotiated between employers and workers, although there are times when the government should step in, as in prohibiting child labor, overtime requirements, paid sick leave, and others.

- Do you support legislation that dictates minimum work hours or scheduling requirements?

I can't comment on legislation I haven't seen. (I gave the same response to Jews United for Justice, which apparently plans to seek support for a bill mandating scheduling in advance, but I don't know the details). I did not support the proposed legislation requiring full-time hours for janitors.

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- What policy ideas do you have to enhance the success of our member job-creators?

We have one of the smartest, most diverse work forces in the United States. We should market ourselves as the International Gateway to the Nation's Capital, to attract employers from around the world and entice the talent our employers need to compete in the global marketplace. While our workforce already possesses more graduate degrees than any other community, and a wider array of language skills than most, we must make language education a higher priority in our schools. Language immersion should be expanded, especially in languages critical for global trade and national security, like Mandarin, Spanish, French, German, Hindi/Urdu, Arabic, Russian, Farsi, and Portuguese.

To appeal to the millennial generation of workers, and the generations that will follow them, we must continue our placemaking efforts, to build great urban communities in locations well served by transit, including Bethesda, Silver Spring, Rockville, Wheaton, and Glenmont, and we must expand transit options to economic opportunity hubs like Gaithersburg, Germantown and White Oak.

We should increase vocational training in our schools. The courses available at Edison High School are insufficient. Not all students will, or need to, attend college. Many good-paying jobs in industrial, manufacturing, information technology and other sectors can be filled by high school graduates with additional technical and vocational training.

We need to continue focused efforts to streamline our planning, permitting and procurement processes to see where they can be made more efficient and business-friendly. We must also strengthen our efforts to keep Montgomery County tax dollars in our local economy, by strengthening programs like the Local Small Business Reserve (which I originated), and minority, female and disabled business purchasing preferences.

I support designating Enterprise Zones to attract investment to areas that are struggling, like Glenmont and Burtonsville. I have also supported tax credits for investors in life science, environmental technology and cybersecurity, and I am currently exploring a county add-on to federal Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) awards. I will seek to reduce our county energy tax, which puts our high-tech and data-intensive businesses at a particular disadvantage.

- Other comments: see above

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.

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- 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 cannot comment on legislation or proposals I haven't seen.
- Would you require that this analysis include interviews and discussions with actual business owners?
During my 16 years on the County Council, I have taken the necessary time to listen to all stakeholders prior to voting on legislation. In many cases I have postponed introducing legislation or votes on legislation to allow for additional time to build consensus among proponents and opponents. As County Executive I will continue to convene stakeholders and take the time to listen carefully to my constituents.
- Why or why not?
I'd need more information about the cost and feasibility of such a requirement, for the county as well as businesses.

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.

Commented [6]:

I understand both the critical importance of small businesses to our neighborhood communities as well as the small profit margin under which they operate. I am the champion of the Local Small Business Reserve Program to ensure small business are well-represented in the county procurement process. I am the co-founder of Bethesda Green, which houses a green business incubator. As County Executive I will convene a Small Business Advisory Committee, and work to develop a package of incentives for start-up businesses, with a particular focus on biotech and life sciences industries.

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?

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I have lived near downtown Silver Spring for thirty years, and I have watched it evolve to a vibrant, thriving, diverse destination spot. That said, I understand how additional office tenants in the downtown area would be of great benefit to the local businesses. As County Executive, I will engage in proactive, hands on outreach to employers, both within the county and in other areas where they may be planning to expand or relocate. I will work with Discovery to ensure its headquarters is occupied by high-wage, high-tech businesses, nonprofit and/or research enterprises whose employees will help keep local businesses vibrant. I will personally, and vocally, market Montgomery County, and Silver Spring, as a great place for business. The County Executive must repeatedly tell our story.

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?

I am strongly committed to economic opportunity for East County. I will work to realize the vision of the White Oak Science Gateway and Burtonsville master plans. I am already in contact with Edens, which owns Burtonsville Crossing, to revitalize that neglected shopping area, as well as with Percontee regarding its plans for Viva White Oak.

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.

As County Executive, I will be a consistent presence in Annapolis. During my decades in county politics, I have developed excellent relationships with all members of the Montgomery County delegation. I know the leaders in the State House, and I know how State government works. I will work closely and productively with whomever is elected Governor in November, 2018. The Governor is the single most important decision-maker in the state when it comes to transportation.

I have been the leading champion of the Purple Line in local office, and a co-founder of Purple Line Now!, an organization of activists which lobbied on behalf of the Purple Line. I am delighted that construction has begun and look forward to riding it in 2022.

I agree that transportation funding must be balanced, and include transit, roads, bicycle and pedestrian improvements.

- How will you assure the future success of the Metro?

As County Executive, I will lead regional efforts to stabilize Metro. The County Council has unanimously expressed support for state legislation establishing a dedicated revenue source for 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?

If elected County Executive, I will advocate for local businesses adversely affected by the purple line construction. I testified in Annapolis in support of Senator Will Smith's legislation to provide a tax credit for losses suffered by businesses as a result of Purple Line construction, and signed a letter expressing support for a state fund to reimburse businesses for documented losses – similar to the county fund established to assist businesses disrupted by construction of the new Wheaton M-NCPPC headquarters, and redevelopment in Fenton Village..

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

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I have lived near downtown Silver Spring for thirty years, and I have watched it evolve into a vibrant, thriving, diverse destination spot. We have a burgeoning restaurant scene where you can find virtually any cuisine, from high end, white linen tablecloth restaurants to underground dive bars, with nearly every continent represented. I am excited about the upcoming opening of two new breweries: Astrolabe and Parallel World. Along with Denizens, these will put Silver Spring on the map as a destination for millennials and foodies.

Silver Spring's cultural scene has also grown. The Fillmore offers a wide variety of acts appealing to diverse audiences and age ranges. Public/private partnerships bring us the jazz and blues festivals, summer concert series, and theater options at a number of local theaters. The beautifully restored AFI is a regional draw with programming appealing to every interest. The new library is a popular destination to grab a book and a cup of coffee and relax in a modern space overlooking the bustling intersections below.

Shopping has improved dramatically. The renovation of Ellsworth Place brought a number of popular discount department stores to augment the small businesses in the mall and along Fenton and Ellsworth Streets. Mall upgrades and the anchor stores have drawn more shoppers, while the Fenton Street shops continue to offer their services and wares in an authentic environment.

My five-year vision for Silver Spring is that the community continues to grow as a destination spot for visitors around the region. That we maintain the incredible diversity of people, restaurants and bars, shops, cultural programming while increasing the number of businesses in the community. As County Executive, I will work with Discovery to ensure its headquarters is occupied by high-wage, high-tech businesses, nonprofit and/or research enterprises whose employees will help keep local businesses vibrant. I will continue to support AFI and look for other opportunities to enhance the arts and entertainment environment. I support the new Business Improvement District and the positive impact it will have on drawing new businesses and visitors to the area while helping to ensure Silver Spring remains a clean and safe place to visit. The Silver Spring Civic Building and Veterans Plaza will continue to be a place where our county celebrates its diversity and vitality with multiple festivals and community events showcasing our status as the International Gateway to the Nation's Capital. Greater Silver Spring is emblematic of how people from every different background can get along and succeed as a community.

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

Some of the metrics I would use are an: increase in the number of affordable housing units in the county, increase in customer service and customer satisfaction, increase in placemaking efforts across the County, increase in equity in housing, increase in inclusion in schools, increase in transit options, increased services to the underserved, decrease in inequity in schools and decrease in regulatory and procedural barriers to economic development.

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