



**GSSCC Questionnaire**  
**Montgomery County Council Candidates**

Name: Gabe Albornoz

Email Address: gabe@gabealbornoz.com

Web Address: www.gabealbornoz.com

Council District for Which You Are Seeking Election: At-Large

Number of Years Lived in that District: 46

Party Affiliation: Democrat

Relevant Non-governmental Professional Experience/Positions Held: Director, Community Relations at Children's National Hospital (199-2003), Deputy Director, Latin American Youth Center (2003-2007), Chair, Montgomery County Democratic Party (2012-14), Leadership Montgomery (2008), Presidential Leadership Scholar (2017)

**Please insert your answers after each question below, or answer using a separate document. Please return the completed questionnaire to [jredicker@gsscc.org](mailto:jredicker@gsscc.org) no later than close of business on Friday, March 4**

1. Over the past two years, the COVID-19 pandemic affected our lives and our economy in unprecedented ways. The County provided financial assistance to help businesses through these unprecedented times, but many businesses and employers have still not recovered.
  - What are you prepared to do to get businesses and our economy back to a sense of normal?
  - What will you do to support business should the COVID pandemic remain with us?
  - What kind of financial support (grants and loans) will you support to help businesses and nonprofit organizations (i.e. commercial rent support, reimbursement for testing kits, grants to support continued telework)?

I will continue to assess how Covid-19 is affecting our community and businesses and support ways to keep businesses open and functioning. I will help ensure that we use all County communication channels to help market that our businesses are open and affirm that we have shifted to an endemic, not pandemic state.

The County will have to continue to provide financial support for sectors that have been disproportionately impacted by the Pandemic. We must also strengthen our workforce development training opportunities to help businesses struggling with hiring. Finally, we need to stream line regulatory policies to make it easier for businesses to navigate the permitting process at all levels.

We must also help address barrier issues to employment such as expanding childcare opportunities for residents. Early in the pandemic, I supported a special appropriation of \$250,000 to provide grants to businesses and non-profit organizations that incurred teleworking costs in order to retain employees and keep the lights on since the beginning of the Covid-19 public health crisis. I would consider doing so again.

2. The Silver Spring Central Business District was envisioned to become a smart-growth, live, work, and play community. However, in the past 10-plus years, Silver Spring has evolved into a primarily residential neighborhood

(bedroom community), with virtually no commercial office development. At this point, the County seems to be focused on just the “live” and “play” aspects. But 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 employers and jobs back to Silver Spring?
- What will you do to revitalize our daytime economy in Silver Spring?

I believe there needs to be a consistent approach to enacting policies and legislation that are business friendly and encourage companies to grow and locate here in the County. While we are a progressive County, we need to merge our values with practical solutions for attracting and retaining businesses.

Specifically, I support the Planning Staff’s recommendations to add height capacity to commercial properties in Silver Spring. We must do more to support existing businesses in Silver Spring so that they can meet their full growth potential. This could include incentives or direct customer service assistance provided by the County’s Economic Development Corporation. I believe we should also more intentionally partner with the newly elected Governor to forge a State/County alliance and approach to economic development opportunities.

I believe there is also an opportunity to establish a Montgomery College Life Sciences campus in downtown Silver Spring. We need to add more college aged residents to the community to help ensure a multi-generational environment. I believe that we can also better leverage our Arts and Humanities opportunities in Silver Spring to make it more of a destination spot for recreation and entertainment.

I have always worked closely with the Silver Spring Chamber and am eager to support initiatives that they feel will grow the economy there.

3. The Planning Board’s Silver Spring Downtown and Adjacent Communities Plan’s sole answer to reviving and expanding Silver Spring’s office market is to simply “improve the public realm (i.e., build more sidewalks, bikeways, parks, etc.). Please explain why you agree or disagree that this is an effective and appropriate strategy for returning economic prosperity to the downtown Silver Spring business district?

While the Council has not yet begun to review the Silver Spring Downtown and Adjacent Communities Plan, and I don’t disagree that sidewalks, bikeways and parks are wonderful amenities, I believe we need practical solutions to increasing business activity in Silver Spring and policies that will encourage more companies to locate here.

4. In recent months, Silver Spring has experienced a dramatic increase in violent crime, which threatens our economy, our business owners, and our residents. The expansion of our “nighttime economy” has been accompanied by some unintended consequences. Two recent surveys show that the top concern of most residents is crime and safety.
  - Will you support bringing either a police substation or creating a new district police station in downtown Silver Spring? Why or why not?
  - Would you support legislation that requires a set closing time for restaurants operating as bars and nightclubs as well as hookah bars (as is done in Prince George’s County and D.C.)? Why or why not?

In the short term, I support a police substation in downtown Silver Spring to help mitigate the worrisome crime waves residents and businesses are currently experiencing. This substation will not only support the 3rd district police station located in White Oak but will continue to be a part of the comprehensive strategy to combat crime, alongside our community and regional partners. In the long-term, I will be open to explore the option of establishing a new district police station in downtown Silver Spring.

Yes, I will support legislation that requires a set closing time for restaurants operating as bars and nightclubs including hookah bars in downtown Silver Spring. Legislative proposals like this will help support measures to keep our communities and businesses safe and be consistent with our neighboring jurisdictions in Prince George’s County and Washington, D.C.

5. 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)?

I introduced legislation supported by our Chambers that will offer a 50% matching grant to small businesses that contribute an employees' Flexible Spending Accounts (FSAs) for childcare. This would not only help employees meet childcare costs but would be a powerful tool for employers aiming to attract talent to their companies.

I also believe we must incentivize and grow our life sciences sector. To that end, I am supporting legislation that will streamline the development process for a biohealth priority campus in certain areas of the County, similar to the process we undertook for Marriott. This will serve as an important economic development tool to attract and retain biohealth companies and continue to build the County's reputation as a leader in the biotech arena.

I supported legislation that expands the eligibility for Montgomery County-based entrepreneurs in the life sciences, biotech and medical sectors to receive county supported research and development grants. The Oversight and Small Business Investment Act, Bill 37-19, expands eligibility to provide funding for research and medical facilities in the county that receive Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) and Small Business Technology Transfer (STTR) funding from the federal government. Additionally, this legislation strengthens the oversight of taxpayer dollars used to support these public investments.

This year I supported a \$500,000 appropriation to support the \$2.5 million strategy phase for a new global Pandemic Prevention and Biodefense Center located in Montgomery County with Connected DMV, which is a regional nonprofit focused on solving complex regional challenges across the Washington metropolitan area.

The center would establish Montgomery County as the global epicenter for pandemic prevention and accelerate economic development for pandemic prevention solutions. A site exploration team will work to identify and finalize a site location in the County for the center in the coming months.

6. Many of our small- and medium-sized business members feel that the policies adopted 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. (For example, the County requires small business owners to pay a recordation tax when they use their personal home as collateral for a business loan that is more than \$3 million. Yet large business owners don't have to personally guarantee anything, let alone put their personal property at risk for access to capital.) Please provide three specific examples of how you will support small businesses and ensure opportunities for them to grow and expand.

Over 90% of businesses in Montgomery County have 50 or fewer employees, and these businesses are an essential part of our community. I am committed to supporting policies that allow them to thrive.

Last year, I supported Bill 3-21 to create a Silver Spring Business Improvement District (SSBID), which will help invigorate economic momentum in Silver Spring and help grow small businesses. The SSBID will help marketing and promotion efforts for the area to bring more activity and customers in downtown.

As mentioned in the previous question, I also introduced legislation that, if passed, will establish a Local Business Child Care Grant Program. This program will allow County businesses with 50 or fewer employees to apply for a grant that will match up to 50% of the employer's contributions to employees' Flexible Spending Accounts (FSAs) for child and dependent care. As the pandemic has shown, childcare is not just a family issue but also a business issue. If we want to attract and retain a talented and dedicated workforce, this isn't a concern we can ignore.

Early in my first term I also worked to amend the Local Small Business Reserve Program, and increased the required percentage of County department procurement contracts for small businesses up to 25% from 20%. This ensures our local government is giving due consideration and work to local and smaller businesses.

I am willing to work with the Chamber and the businesses to explore other ways to promote and spur economic activity in Silver Spring.

7. The Route 29 Corridor in Eastern Montgomery County has suffered from a lack of commercial and other development for many years. Few, if any new employment opportunities have been created to provide jobs that would address complaints about traffic congestion (that is taking employees to Silver Spring or D.C.) or bring economic prosperity to this area. What are you going to do to ensure economic development that brings new businesses and jobs to the East County/Rt. 29 Corridor?

I am a staunch supporter of the Route 29 Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) line, which will spark more economic development in the White Oak Master Plan area. I am currently working with the Maryland DOT to dedicate funding for making this BRT line a reality and create a commuter line that will bring biotech companies to locate near the FDA.

I also supported eliminating the impact taxes for the East County opportunity zones, which will help spur development there.

8. The Chamber supports a balanced approach to transportation policies that takes 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.
  - What is your proposal to balance this equation -roads, trains, buses, roads, parking garages? Need all to get people to work?
  - What will you do to address the needs and concerns of businesses that expect to be harmed financially during the continued construction of The Purple Line?

One of my goals for the next term is to help develop a transit system that not only works for commuters, but services residents in all their daily activities, from grocery shopping to doctor's visits. We need transportation that is environmentally friendly and reduces our greenhouse gas emissions, which is why I've introduced a bill that requires future legislation to undergo an assessment for climate impact. However, we also need options that emphasize smart growth principles and give residents as many options as possible and that connect the community in multiple ways.

In terms of the construction of the Purple Line, of course, this is a massive project that will impact the community's transportation system for decades. During this project, it is unavoidable that construction may affect some businesses negatively, and we have a duty to respond to those concerns and proceed in a way that balances benefits and consequences.

In November of last year, I supported a special appropriation to the 2022 budget to put \$231,000 towards alleviating financial loss due to the construction of the Purple Line. The grant, which is administered by the Latino Economic Development Center, makes individual businesses that have been operating since 2017 eligible for \$5,000, and is especially important for our smaller, locally-owned businesses. I would consider similar and other measures, with input from the Chamber, in the future as well.

In the long-term, the Purple Line will provide multiple benefits to the businesses in the corridor. Over the next twenty years Montgomery and Prince George's Counties are expected to grow by about a quarter of a million jobs, and the Purple Line will capture approximately 20% of that, bringing new metro rail riders through the Bethesda, Silver Spring, and University of Maryland employment powerhouses. These people will bring significant economic benefits to the businesses in the Purple Line corridor. I am committed to supporting our business community through the construction process and adjusting to this new part of or transportation system.

9. In 2019, the Council passed legislation to require an Economic Impact analysis to determine a proposed bill's potential positive or negative effects, if any, on the County's workforce, taxation policy, property values, incomes,

operating costs to businesses and non-profits operating in the County, capital investment from the private sector, economic development, and the County's competitiveness. The Chamber believes that this effort has not always focused sufficiently on impacts to existing businesses and the economy as a whole.

- Would you require that this analysis include interviews and discussions with actual business owners? Why or why not?
- Would you require this analysis to include formal input from the Montgomery County Economic Development Corporation? Why or why not?
- Would you require this analysis to include formal input from the County Chamber of Commerce, and the individual area Chambers (rather than just the Montgomery County Economic Development Corporation? Why or why not?

I would support requiring that economic impact analyses require interviews with business owners in the affected sectors, and would agree to allowing MCEDC and the Chamber to have input as the analysis is being done.

10. What is your vision for the future of greater Silver Spring and Montgomery County, and what is needed to accomplish this vision, over the next 5 years?

My vision for Greater Silver Spring is a vibrant, diverse, multigenerational, and safe community in which residents can work, relax, raise their families, and live out their golden years. This will be accomplished through an authentic and productive partnership between our public, private, and non-profit sectors. I commit to work to build bridges among these sectors, to be responsive to community needs, and to support all businesses to meet their full potential.