



GSSCC Questionnaire
Montgomery County Council Candidates

Name: **Fatmata Barrie**

Email Address: **Fatmata@fatmatabarrie.com**

Web Address: **www.fatmatabarrie.com**

Council District for Which You Are Seeking Election: **County District 5**

Number of Years Lived in that District: **20 years**

Party Affiliation: **Democrat**

Relevant Non-governmental Professional Experience/Positions Held: **Practicing Immigration and Special Education Attorney (20 Years)**

Please insert your answers after each question below, or answer using a separate document. Please return the completed questionnaire to 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)?

Answer:

I am seriously concerned about the impact of the Pandemic on our communities, particularly our vulnerable population and small businesses. Homelessness, food insecurity, and educational inequities have increased dramatically due to the Pandemic. But the reality is that many of our residents and small businesses struggled even before the pandemic. Our goal should not be to go “back to normal”; it should be to move beyond the “normal inequities” that existed before the Pandemic. It is well known that Maryland has one of the highest rates of minority owned businesses that employ almost 10% of the private workforce in the State. The largest demographic in the new District 5 is Black Americans at 37% of the total District population - the highest in the County. Redistribution of funds to accelerate programs to bring our residents out of poverty and recover from the pandemic is non-negotiable. In fact, no small business owner should be locked out of business opportunities because of their ethnicity, socioeconomic status, or zip code.

Suggested actions to support our small businesses:

- Programs that direct Federal and State recovery funds to provide testing, healthcare, and supplies to businesses and their employees.

- Release businesses who transitioned to virtual business models from Brick and Mortar lease arrangements with no or modified penalties.
- Free parking for patrons
- Extend the free Ride On bus to a permanent status to alleviate the burden on commuters and make it easier for residents to frequent area businesses.

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?

Answer:

The County should work with marketing and business development advisors to create a plan to attract both commercial and industrial businesses into the area. To create a center for popular retail chains and a hub for high technology (e.g. Cyber-Hub). Large businesses bring more people and revenue into the area which in turn create the need for more small businesses and services.

Suggested initiatives might be:

- Tax and other incentives for large and small businesses to locate to the area.
- Create job training programs at local community colleges and community centers so that community residents can acquire skills that will qualify them to work at high wage jobs. Having a source of qualified employees will attract company investment into the area.
- Offer a streamlined application process and access to low-cost or interest-free loan programs for intrapreneurs.
- The local Chambers should work closely and collaboratively with the planning department to ensure that Thrive 2050 is in alignment with the goals of the small business community and local residents - a people first model.
- The local Chambers should work closely with the BIDs to ensure they are deliberately working to create a racially equitable plan for local investment.

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?

Answer:

A plan to revive Silver Spring’s office market needs to be far more fundamental and multifaceted than just “improving the public realm”. We must turn liabilities into assets. Discounted lease costs will not get back the businesses we have lost over the pandemic, nor will it revitalize abandoned locations. We must go farther than that.

For example:

- Even building sidewalks and bikeways require long-term planning in conjunction with other development projects so that the features are integrated with existing infrastructure versus encroaching on it. The bike lanes installed on a portion of University Blvd in Silver Spring is a perfect example of a poorly planned and executed project that negatively impacted traffic flow and received resident pushback. They have since been removed.

- Silver Spring needs a smart growth strategy. Rather than simply attracting big employers, we should select companies from specific industry and market segments that would benefit from the area's existing assets. For example, the city is ethnically diverse and has cultural offerings for a diverse population of employees.
- Although I understand the concern about focusing on residential versus commercial, businesses will thrive on a walkable main street and where families can live close to where they work and shop.
- Create tourist attractions that bring investments into the local economy.
- Create an Entrepreneurial program to incentivize small business owners to occupy existing empty office space before signing on to newly built space at a higher price.
- The City should attract and develop more dedicated, theme, cost-effective, shared office space, such as the Nonprofit Village in Rockville and Regus in Silver Spring

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?

I am very concerned about the safety of all Montgomery County residents and concerned about the businesses in Downtown Silver Spring. I have relationships with many of the restaurant owners down there. I frequent some of the establishments, especially in the evening. I love it and want to continue to frequent the area. Safety is always a concern. We must acknowledge the rise in incidents but also keep in mind that it is countywide and nationwide.

- I am not sure whether having a new police station will be a deterrent for these acts. I live in White Oak and the district station is walking distance from my home. I cannot honestly say that having the station there has made a huge impact on criminal behaviors. However, I have not done a study, and so cannot definitively say. However, we know of studies that have shown that the economy is directly linked to crime, especially crime related to theft. No, I am not excusing criminal behavior. People must be held accountable for their behaviors. However, I also know that if we target the root cause of problems, then we have a greater chance of mitigating the situations. I believe having jobs available, especially good paying jobs, providing wrap around services for our youth to help stave off some of these behaviors we see in our youth down there and ensuring businesses have the support they need could help mitigate the issues. Additionally, the pandemic has not helped much. We must have mental health services available to our community members.
- To opine on this, I will need to have conversations with the business owners who will be impacted and the communities who frequent the area. We know many of these businesses make a lot of their income on the night life. So, we will have to deal with this in a holistic way. Bring the small business owners and the community together

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)?

Answer:

My answers to Questions #2 and #3 on this survey are also relevant to this question. Silver Spring is already known as a destination to experience diversity of ethnicity and is rich with ethnic food and other cultural offerings. We should leverage this local capability to attract new business growth. Business growth will in turn impact the tax rate. However, I will reiterate the concept of “train them and they will come”, meaning that if we want the SS area to be known as a “Cyber-hub” for example, Cyber employers will come into the area if they know they can find trained, skilled employees who live where they will work and have been professionally trained at local colleges and community programs, including technical high schools.

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.

Answer:

As outlined in my answer to Q#1 Maryland has one of the highest rates of minority owned businesses that employ almost 10% of the private workforce in the State. The largest demographic groups in the new District 5 is Black and Hispanic residents totaling over 57% of the total District population - the highest in the County. No small business owner should be locked out of business opportunities because of their ethnicity, socioeconomic status, or zip code.

Here are three specific examples of how I will support small businesses to help them to grow and expand:

1. Local businesses should have input into development projects in the neighborhood
 2. Regulations and requirements should at the very least be equal for all business-owners. We have seen large multinational companies go out of business and let valuable property lie fallow without consequences or collateral that can be used by the county or city to recoup losses and rebuild. Small, particularly disadvantaged, business owners should have access to programs that put them on a level playing field with larger business entities and small businesses in other counties in the state.
 3. Streamlined application processes and provide advisory services for non-English speaking residents and business owners. Potential business owners may discover that they can own real estate or start a small business, activities they may have thought to be out of reach.
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?

Answer:

I have lived in White Oak for 20 years. We are expecting revitalization to take place with the White Oak Science Gateway Master Plan & Viva White Oak. The issue here is that the development could cause our community members to be displaced. The council can create legislation that directly addresses the need for more affordable housing and hold developers accountable by ensuring that when they build, they consider the people who already live in the community they are building in. Additionally, the council should have the ability to push for different types of taxing of existing homes when new properties are built in any community to stave off the possibility of pricing people out of their home. It is a complex problem to balance commercial economic development and preserving the personality of the surrounding communities, and ensuring that the neighborhood continues to grow and thrive.

- Incentives for Public, Private, Partnerships between private companies and local academia to provide training programs for potential employees to upgrade their skills.
- Attract destination commercial businesses such as Costco, BJ's. Also, create a town center concept similar to Pike and Rose in Rockville but without kicking out the people who live here. Create development without disenfranchising the current residents.
- The key is access to transportation. Any metro solution would take a decade of planning. Therefore, a network of bus routes from other areas in the county should be created. In addition, the BRT should have dedicated lanes on US-29. In fact, I have testified for the BRT.

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?

Answer:

Transportation is a critical component of an inclusive, integrated, economic development plan. Access to safe, reliable transportation is the connective tissue that keeps a community viable and growing. Just a few proposals to keep our residents and businesses connected are:

- I believe in dedicated lanes for the BRT. Without dedicated lanes, it defeats the purpose. If the buses move along with the traffic, then why would I give up my car to get on the bus. It works in DC, it works in NYC. It can work here. I live off US-29 and pre-COVID, the traffic was horrendous. At some point, we will be getting back to that. Our community is growing. Howard county is growing. We need a dedicated lane.
- In having new construction, we make them accessible by creating a walkable community and creating transit that is within walking distance and/or incentivize large corporations to upgrade surrounding access lanes and infrastructure
- Surrounding businesses impacted by any large construction project, whether private or public, should be compensated.
- As a legislator, I will engage with the affected communities and bring in experts on these topics. I am running on equity and inclusion and as such, my number one priority is to ensure that we work to eliminate school and housing segregation, bring economic development that has been long needed to east county, and bring transit stations and transit services to more dense communities like White Oak. I will work with council colleagues and the Executive's office to hold builders/developers/the county to the standard of building/developing with a racial and economic equity lens.

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?

Answer

I believe that Thrive Montgomery 2050 is an example of what this question is addressing. Thrive Montgomery 2050 aims to increase infill development, build communities around Parks, build racial equity, and ensure our local government is working towards a unified common goal. I support any plan that aims for equity, and I pledge to work to ensure the implementation is inclusive and effective. However, I also believe that the Thrive 2050 amendment to the General Plan is both misdirected and misunderstood. There hasn't been adequate public input, partly due to the lack of availability of open forums and more importantly the lack of understanding of what Thrive is proposing. Until the planning department establishes a more transparent process and strives to educate the resident stakeholders whose future will be impacted, Thrive Montgomery 2050 should be put on hold. Then once it is on track with inclusive buy-in from all the stakeholders, then economic development in the area should be accelerated to keep up with the population growth. On the council, I will ensure that Thrive 2050 is appropriately re-assessed, communicated to all the stakeholders, modified if needed with an accelerated timeline, and provide regular oversight.

Additionally, a report from the council's Office of Legislative Oversight (OLO) determines that it would not promote racial equity if implemented as is. I believe that this report should be taken seriously, and we should get back to the drawing board to ensure that any plans we implement are reflective of us as a diverse county and that equity and inclusion is woven in.

I can see the importance of having an analysis done by MCEDC. However, that does not mean they have the final say. It is possible that we can have a different perspective. I will consider discussing this possibility. Regardless, what I can say is that economic development is about people, not corporations, and the residents and small business owners and entrepreneurs in Montgomery County need to have a voice in their future.

So, yes, I believe that as we plan for small businesses, we must include small businesses in the discussion. How do you plan for someone without their input? Unfortunately, we have a history of making decisions for groups and communities, but yet they are not at the table when these decisions are made. It is counterproductive as the impacted group knows more about what they need.

The chamber(s) represent the interests of the business community in the county. Therefore, I think including the chamber's input will be very beneficial in the decision making process. This again goes towards ensuring inclusion and giving the impacted groups a seat at the table. So, I think this is something that could be done.

Also keep in mind that we could have legislation in place to address some of these issues, however, it depends on who is in office to implement these legislation. An example is the Silver Spring BID which the OLO found to be not pass muster when seen through the racial equity and social justice lens. However, despite this fact all but one councilmember, CM Jawando, voted for the bill and overrode the County Executive's veto. Now, this is law, even though it was determined it would disenfranchise the small, Black and Brown and immigrant business owners and give power to the White rich property owners. I would have voted against this bill and agreed to amendments to create equity and inclusion in the law.

What we need in any large development project or plan is Transparency, Transparency, Transparency and Equity and Inclusion!

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?

Answer:

One of the cornerstones of my platform is an inclusive, integrated, economic development plan. What does this mean? The central tenet of economic development should be about people, not just about attracting investment. An integrative

economic development plan will consider all aspects of community life, with equal access to all residents, including incentivizing small and large businesses to locate in underserved neighborhoods so families will have access to quality food sources, accessible childcare, and job opportunities near where they live and attend school. This includes affordable and safe transportation options to provide access to specialty services outside an immediate neighborhood, as well as educational and training opportunities. Any economic development project evaluated at the county level should be able to show how it addresses the needs of the surrounding community, including the project's racial, environmental, and social impact.

The most important thing we need to address as our community grows is the perpetuation of poverty. Will this population growth mean that more children and families will be living in poverty, or will our growth plan include lifting existing and future residents out of poverty? This means we need a smart and inclusive approach to economic development in the region to give families an opportunity to thrive. In addition, small businesses represent 80% of the county's businesses and many of these small businesses are owned by people of color. Therefore, every project should be viewed through a racial equity lens, as well as, be evaluated for its environmental impact and access to transportation. Residents need to be able to live and work in their own community. This means access to home, work, and school within 30 minutes. Finally, we **MUST** plan for the impact the population growth will have on our children. New schools and services are of paramount importance. The bottom-line is that we need an all-inclusive, integrative approach to economic development.