



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

Name: Al Carr

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Council District for Which You Are Seeking Election: 4

Number of Years Lived in that District: 25

Party Affiliation: Democrat

Relevant Non-governmental Professional Experience/Positions Held: 20 years of experience in the

**telecommunications field working for large companies as well as a DC area startup. Worked in operations, marketing, technical sales, government relations and broadband fiber optic deployment. While working for a company named Bell Atlantic in 1990, I was tasked with setting up a new product telecom lab in one of the six states we covered. I chose downtown Silver Spring (big brick phone company central office building on Georgia Ave). I have a bachelors degree in Electrical Engineering (with honors) and a certificate in local government studies from UMD. I was elected to 3 terms on the Kensington Council. I have served 15 years in the Maryland House of Delegates where I worked on economic development as well as taxation issues.**

**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?  
**The County can facilitate governmental assistance using federal, state and county funds to offer grants, loans, technical help, marketing support etc to get us closer to normal.**
  - What will you do to support business should the COVID pandemic remain with us?  
**Montgomery County and Maryland needs to take this opportunity to permanently rethink our processes and permanently reduce fees and paperwork burdens on small businesses. I was proud to write and secure passage of a state law recently to do just that (traders license fees). I then worked with councilmembers Glass and Friedson to pass a County bill to implement it locally. As a result, thousands of businesses throughout the County are benefiting. I will seek additional opportunities like that. There are many pandemic supports we can continue if needed.**
  - 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)?  
**All of the above**
  
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?  
**Silver Spring has many assets. With my 20 years of private sector experience plus 20 years of experience in state and local government, I am highly knowledgeable about both spheres. The job of the government is to invest in infrastructure - transit, parks, libraries, roads, sidewalks, schools, public safety, health etc. The goal is to create attractive places to live, work, retire, or start a business. We need to continue that investment and insist on excellent designs in land use planning. After the pandemic, we need to re-think and recalibrate our assumptions. There may be more opportunities to attract businesses and workers who want to be closer to home or who have a hybrid arrangement with telework some days of the week.**

- What will you do to revitalize our daytime economy in Silver Spring?  
**In addition to recruiting nonprofit and private sector companies/tenants, Montgomery County should look for opportunities to recruit state, county and federal governmental agencies to expand or relocate in Silver Spring. The Housing Opportunities Commission’s planned relocation from a repurposed county-owned elementary school building in Kensington to their own headquarters in downtown Silver Spring is an example that we should try to replicate. An investment in commuter rail will make places of employment downtown Silver Spring more accessible to workers throughout the region. We need: 1) a 3rd track on the MARC Brunswick line, 2) all-day, two-way MARC service; 3) weekend MARC service; and run-through service for a one-seat ride to L-Enfant Plaza, Crystal City and Alexandria.**

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?

**We need to do more but I do agree with the idea of investing in public infrastructure - especially transit. And we need to insist on excellent design so that Silver Spring continues to be vibrant and desirable. I read GSSCC’s testimony letter on the draft plan dated February 17 and much of it is spot on.**

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?

**Yes, I would support bringing a police substation or creating a new district police station in downtown Silver Spring. It is a logical location.**

- 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 need to learn more but yes, I am open minded about this idea**

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.

**As described above, I am proud to have passed state legislation and partnered with Glass/Friedson on county legislation to permanently reduce fees and paperwork on brick and mortar small businesses (traders license). I also support the idea of requiring that the county government keep our spending local where possible and support our small businesses. The county can do more to oversee WSSC, our bicounty water and sewer agency. There is an overspending problem there that contributes to high rates - some businesses and residents pay double of what Fairfax pays for water.**

- Please describe your plan for increasing the tax base – rather than tax rates – in the County.  
**Taxation is an area of my legislative focus at the state and local level over 20 years. The tax base should be as broad as possible so that everyone pays their fair share. Assessments should be fair and should reflect the market value. Public investment in infrastructure leads to economic activity and an expanded tax base.**
- 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 am pleased that the county consolidated multiple agencies into a single location in Wheaton. I am looking forward to the soon to be completed revamp of permitting services that should ease burdens on applicants. I will look for further opportunities to make the development process work more smoothly - one problem I am aware of is poor recordkeeping by MCDOT of stormwater infrastructure resulting in delays and surprises for applicants and the public. See above answer on how I made Montgomery County more competitive by reducing fees and paperwork on brick and mortar small businesses. See above answer on how I will increase oversight on WSSC and their high water/sewer rates. The perception of Montgomery County as being unattractive to business is sometimes just that - a perception - but not necessarily a reality from the standpoint of taxation and other measures. We need to market ourselves and proactively recruit businesses. I am proud of bills I wrote to improve the Enterprise Zone law and make tax credits more accessible to tenants.**

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.

**I will seek ways to address the recordation tax issue mentioned above. As a candidate who worked in the private sector for 20 years for large companies and a startup, I have an appreciation for the importance and role of both large and small businesses. Most of my career was spent helping large and small companies and organizations use technology to achieve their business goals. Formative experiences for me were opening a regional telecom product lab on Georgia Ave in downtown Silver Spring in 1990, opening a storefront in Wheaton in 2007 and helping deploy hundreds of millions of dollars in broadband fiber optic infrastructure in the mid-2000's. I've written a number of state laws to help with economic development including improving our alcohol law and improving various tax credits. Here are three examples**

- 1) As mentioned above, I successfully partnered with others to reduce fees and paperwork for small businesses in Montgomery County. I will look for additional opportunities**
- 2) As mentioned above, I will provide oversight of WSSC where there is an overspending problem contributing to water rates that are double those of Fairfax for many businesses and residents**
- 3) As mentioned above, I will support programs to ensure county funds are spent locally when possible**

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 worked at a building on Route 29 for many years (C&P/Bell Atlantic/Verizon Chesapeake Complex) so I am very familiar with the corridor. My first visit to the building in 1989 was a harrowing walk from the nearby Marriott Courtyard hotel. That corridor needs better transit/bike/pedestrian infrastructure. Road intersections need to be rethought. It has great potential because it is a convenient location that is reachable by employees throughout Maryland.**

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.

**I support investing in transit. We need a third track and 7-days-per-week, all-day, two-way MARC service that continues past Union Station into Virginia. We can investigate relocating the greyhound bus stop to be closer to metro, MARC, Ride On and Metrobus. We must continue to invest in metrorail so that it is affordable, safe, reliable and frequent. We can invest in Bus Rapid Transit and rethink our entire Ride On and Metro bus network to make it run faster, more reliably and more frequently. We need excellent pedestrian infrastructure including good lighting. We need bicycle infrastructure including regional trail**

**connections like the Metropolitan Branch Trail and the Capital Crescent Trail. We need to maintain our roads and county parking garages so that they are safe and we need to enforce our traffic laws.**

- What is your proposal to balance this equation -roads, trains, buses, roads, parking garages? Need all to get people to work?

**See above answer**

- 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?

**I supported state legislation that will provide grants to businesses negatively impacted by projects like the purple line. I will work with our state legislators to ensure this problem is funded.**

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? **YES. Because the best ideas often come from those affected and with the expertise**
- Would you require this analysis to include formal input from the Montgomery County Economic Development Corporation? Why or why not? **YES - see above**
- 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? **YES - see above**

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?

**I see a vibrant, thriving community that is a safe, welcoming and attractive place to live, own, rent, work, grow, retire, study, raise a family, start or run a business. As a former Kensington council member, I am proud of my contributions over 20 years to improve the economy and the built environment in Kensington. I have also worked hard as a state legislator to improve our other commercial areas and downtowns in Montgomery Hills, Wheaton and Silver Spring.**