



GSSCC Questionnaire
Montgomery County Council Candidates

Name: _____ Amy Ginsburg _____

Email Address: _____ amy@amyginsburg.com _____

Web Address:
_____ www.amyginsburg.com _____

Council District for Which You Are Seeking Election: _____ 4 _____

Number of Years Lived in that District: _____ 55 _____

Party Affiliation: _____ Democrat _____

Relevant Non-governmental Professional Experience/Positions Held: Executive Director Friends of White Flint, Executive Director Manna Food Center, Executive Director Neediest Kids, Director of Marketing Combined Federal Campaign, Director of Development The Concord Coalition, Director of Development Visiting Nurse Association, Director of Development Coalition for the Homeless

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)?

I agree that the pandemic continues to wreak havoc with restaurants, retail, and other small businesses. While money flowed two years ago, those funds have dried up. Montgomery County should spend some of its ARPA funds to ensure that small businesses can survive until business picks up; whether there are no-interest loans or grants would be something to discuss, although I would favor both, depending on the size and location of the business. These grants could be used for the fixed costs of running a business – rent, utilities, etc., as well as staffing, Covid-related supplies, and promotions. If we want our communities like Silver Spring to prosper now and after the pandemic, we must passionately support the many businesses who are vital components of our community.

I would add that the county must make those grants and loans as free of unnecessary paperwork as possible while still allowing accountability and preventing fraud. Our businesses are swamped just trying to survive – adding additional, and generally bureaucratic, hurdles helps no one and harms many.

The county should also look at ways it can simply regulations and inspections because too often they add significant costs and delays to keeping businesses open without improving safety.

Finally, the council, county executive, MCEDC, Visit Montgomery, and others, should promote our retailers, restaurants, and businesses. At the start of the pandemic, residents supported their local shops by buying gift cards and getting take out with the enthusiastic prompting of leaders. We should have been doing that for the entire two years of the pandemic and should be doing it now.

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?

The daytime economy is vital for restaurants and retail establishments – they need both lunches and dinners to thrive. To bring employers and jobs back to Silver Spring, we need to do a much better job of actively recruiting those businesses. MCEDC and the county must be aggressive in their recruitment efforts on a national level. Silver Spring is a vibrant, smart growth community, which is exactly what companies desire, but Montgomery County needs to be more active and more strategic in recruiting large and medium-sized national companies to come to Silver Spring. There needs to be more accountability and transparency at MCEDC and business owners need to be part of these recruitment efforts.

We can also create spaces that attract emerging businesses. An arts incubator and using unrented storefronts for artisans and crafters can attract daytime traffic and daytime employees. Like Asheville, Silver Spring could be a center for crafters and artists, everything from glass blowing to handmade furniture to sculpture to wall art to hand-knit clothes to pottery. People would come to watch artists at work and to buy unique items that can't be found online. This would drive street traffic which would help restaurants and other retailers. It would also help with the placemaking and “it” factor that attracts larger corporations and 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?

Improving the public realm is important – walkability, bikeability, and recreational spaces are amenities desired by many residents and businesses – but they alone will not revive and expand Silver Spring’s office market. As I said in question 2, we need to also do a much better job of recruiting large and medium-size companies and create spaces that attract emerging businesses that are unique to Silver Spring and provide a great sense of place and vibrancy.

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?

I believe it was a mistake to remove the substation from downtown Silver Spring and believe it should come back. Community policing needs to be part of the solution. When police officers are part of the community, when the police and community have mutual trust and respect that comes from positive engagement, crime does down. Studies have shown that when police are an integral part of a community, there is no longer a “we” and “them” mentality, which decreases unacceptable profiling and targeting based on race.

We must also increase the pay for our police. We once offered the highest salaries in the state, but now offer salaries ranked second from the bottom. If we want the best and brightest working in our communities, we must offer the best training and best salaries. If we want our police to be part of our community, we must help them

afford homes in our community and help all essential personnel (including police) with rent and/or mortgage subsidies to encourage them to live and work in Montgomery County.

We also need to add mental health professionals to the team of first responders so that mental health crises are addressed by people trained for such situations. They may need police backup, but everyone benefits when the right mix of professional first responders are sent to address volatile situations.

- **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?**

Yes, it makes no sense that bars and nightclubs can operate for hours past last call. We should have the same rules as surrounding jurisdictions so that our bars and nightclubs don't become after-hours meccas for people around the region.

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)?**

As executive director of Friends of White Flint, I was part of the county effort to land the second Amazon headquarters. While not successful, the county put together an excellent package of incentives and made an excellent presentation to Amazon. For the past seven years, as executive director of Friends of White Flint, I have worked to create a business-friendly environment focused on implementing a master plan that creates a walkable, transit-oriented, smart growth community. Friends of White Flint and I have promoted and supported both large and small businesses in the Pike District for more than seven years.

You're exactly right -- we need to expand the tax base so we have more things to tax rather than tax people and businesses more. By creating, improving, and supporting smart growth, vibrant communities like Silver Spring, we can attract companies and investment. Places like Silver Spring – vibrant town centers with accessible transit, walkable downtowns, a variety of housing options, and recreational opportunities – are exactly what companies desire.

While our taxes are a bit higher than in neighboring jurisdictions, one of the real problems with attracting businesses is that Montgomery County is a place of "no." We don't welcome enterprises with open arms; instead we cite three obscure regulations why something can't be done and begrudgingly accept a corporation's efforts to come here or expand here. We need to be the county of "yes." That's a county that tells the current business community and potential businesses, "yes, we very much want you to come here/expand here, and we are going to help you any way we can." By ensuring permitting services, regulations, zoning hearings, and other time-sucking entities work far more quickly and with far more transparency, we can be partners with business rather than adversaries, all without compromising public safety. Time is money, and Montgomery County must embrace working quickly and with agility, as do our competitors across the river and across Maryland.

Montgomery County should also have small business ombudsmen who can help a new business navigate the complex processes of opening a business, store, or restaurant. These ombudsmen would help that business work through the permitting and approvals processes so that enterprises can open on schedule, acting as a partner, advisor, and trouble-shooter.

We also need to build more affordable, attainable, and market-rate housing so the employees and future employees of companies have places to live. Not having sufficient housing, and not having a variety of housing types, is a large barrier to economic development and attractive investment in our communities.

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.

First, I will be sure to include the voices of small and medium-sized, locally-owned businesses in the advice I receive as councilmember. I think we ought to start a small business advisory group that is composed only of a variety of locally-owned, small and medium-sized businesses that would advise the council on issues and make suggestions for legislation.

Second, I will review regulations to make sure only those that are truly needed to keep us safe and protect our environment are enforced. Also, I work to ensure that complying with those regulations in real life is not an onerous, confusing, inefficient process that has little benefit, only costs. Our regulations and laws must make sense and have a real purpose besides providing one more hurdle for a new enterprise or project to overcome at great time and expense. The Dept. of Permitting must be more responsive and agile, always keeping in mind that time is money when launching or growing a business.

Third, I will work to change the current attitude in local government that begrudgingly accepts business and enterprise to one that enthusiastically embraces the small and medium-sized businesses that provide the majority of our jobs. Creating and supporting vibrant smart growth communities with lots of ground-floor retail is an important part of the welcome. This doesn't even take money, only will and leadership. I am running for county council because I want Montgomery County to be a place that welcomes businesses and helps residents with enthusiasm, competence, and efficiency. Whether it's creating an arts incubator space to fill unused storefronts and drive traffic to working hard to attract the corporations that give restaurants and stores that essential day-time traffic, I will work hard to welcome and support businesses and the jobs and economic vitality they create.

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?

We need to make downtown Silver Spring is revitalized because only a thriving downtown Silver Spring will give White Oak a chance to succeed. Our economic development must be aggressive, targeted, and smart so that we can compete with neighboring jurisdiction. And that economic development must serve both the east and west sides of the county.

We should also fix BRT so that it operated in its own lane south of Four Corners so that we can help alleviate some of the traffic on Route 29.

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?

We must financially support the businesses that continue to be harmed financially by the Purple Line construction. The amount of funds that required is a pittance compared to the scope and cost of this project, and those business owners and their employees should not suffer from a transit project over which they have no control.

Right now, we do need both multi-modal transit and roads so that workers and customers can get to work, home, and places to play. That said, by increasing housing density and bringing more corporate jobs into town centers, we can create places that are walkable, something desired by most employees and employers.

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?

Yes, this analysis should include interviews and discussion with businesses owners, MCEDC, and chambers of commers so that the analysis is as complete and comprehensive as possible.

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 is a county where high-quality jobs are plentiful, town centers are vibrant and full of ground-level retail, and there are a variety of types of homes that people can afford. To do that, we need to create places, address the housing shortage, and make sure our schools offer a world-class education so that we can then attract investments and high-quality jobs. I also envision a county that says Yes and is exceptionally responsive to its businesses and residents, providing efficient service and enthusiastic support