



GSSCC Questionnaire
Montgomery County Council Candidates

Name: Maricé Morales

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Council District for Which You Are Seeking Election: Montgomery County Council District 6

Number of Years Lived in that District: 10

Party Affiliation: Democrat

Relevant Non-governmental Professional Experience/Positions Held: Opened my own [law office](#) in 2019 where I provide a tailored legal service in a timely manner with empathy and understanding to ensure that my clients' needs are met with the highest level of quality and efficiency. My focus areas are immigration, criminal defense, and personal injury law. I have served on the following boards: Jewish Council on Aging (currently serving), Montgomery College Board of Trustees (currently serving), Committee for Montgomery, Emerge Maryland. I also host my own Spanish-language radio show focused on legislation and the law.

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?

I will work closely with County business owners, local economic development officials, state program heads (e.g., the heads of Maryland's Small Business Development Center and TEDCO), and others (e.g., Greater Silver Spring Chamber of Commerce, Montgomery County Chamber of Commerce, Hispanic Chamber of Commerce) to (1) ascertain the unmet needs of our local business owners, (2) inventory the supports now given them, and therefore (3) determine what new supports need to be provided, whether it be public, private, nonprofit, or academic.

- What will you do to support business should the COVID pandemic remain with us?

I will seek to create a new County fund to allow us to retain, for use by the County business community, more MD Small Business Development Center consultants to help business owners make it through the pandemic with their lives' dreams still intact.

- 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)?

This question cannot be answered in a vacuum. Hard data on what precisely is needed is difficult to come by, as MD Senator Katie Hester's bill in the General Assembly (SB 782) makes clear. Until we know what's needed, it's hard to say what I would support. As a general matter, though, the three examples provided are among the types of support I would expect to enthusiastically get behind.

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?

I have long backed smart growth development in and near our transit centers for precisely this reason, and I will continue to be supportive.

- What will you do to revitalize our daytime economy in Silver Spring?

I would work with state and local economic development leaders to bring new, and better targeted, economic development programming to Silver Spring. In particular, I would work with the state's Small Business Development Center to bolster the rate at which businesses are being started in our community.

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?

I applaud improving the public realm in the ways suggested, but frankly it's not remotely enough. My vision for Silver Spring involves (1) providing more grant, loan, loan guarantee, consulting, training, and other forms of assistance to current and prospective business owners and (2) working with Montgomery College and other higher ed institutions that can provide, in exchange for credit, a student workforce for employers in tech and life sciences that will look to our County to establish their headquarters and create other new job training programs. That way, there will be a solid, locally sourced workforce capable of staffing the many new companies I believe are needed in a way that our Planning Board, apparently, does not.

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 am supportive of policies that will continue to bring growth to our local economy. I believe that there can be a thriving night time economy that can remain safe, as long as we strive for a shared responsibility among business owners and patrons to contribute to a night time economy where folks feel safe to participate. I reject the assumption that the presence of crime is a direct consequence of the “night time economy”. I would be open to assessing. If we compare our recently growing night time economy to the thriving night time economies in DC, Arlington and Tysons Corner, we may be limiting ourselves from the types of recreational businesses that young people, professionals and folks of all backgrounds may look for when choosing where to live. I would be interested in creating a task force that surveys the current status of night life in the county, opportunities of improvement, and identifying areas where there may be an appetite to incentivize the growth of a night time economy.

- 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?

At the moment, I would not. I have not seen data that proves the proposition that Montgomery County’s bars and nightclubs are primary breeding grounds of crime.

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.

I believe in creating incentives to attract and retain innovative startups and entrepreneurship. In addition to tax incentives, the County could invest in sustainable models of workspaces for both academic institutions, like Montgomery College, and new entrepreneurs creating innovation hubs. Innovation hubs like these would connect new business owners with the resources they need to expand and thrive. Further, economic development programs, such as the Viva White Oak plan, also provide jobs for this central area of the county.

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

In addition to the proposals stated above, my vision is one that continues to make our County a popular destination for young professionals, entrepreneurs, and innovative thinkers that will invest and use their talent and skill in our County. Economists describe that the best asset of any jurisdiction is its human capital, and its ability to attract and retain a highly trained workforce. As long as we’re getting ahead of the population growth in our county, and developing walkable communities that attract folks vis a vis northern Virginia and DC, we will continue to expand our tax base, by the simple fact that more taxpayers want to live and succeed in our 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)?

First, I would work behind the scenes to have our County Executive and County Council speak with one pro-business voice. It helps no-one for County Executive Elrich to flippantly denigrate those who think we're insufficiently pro-business, or to suggest that if there aren't jobs here then our residents can move to where they are. Rhetoric matters. Second, as noted above, I would convene business owners, county and state officials, and others to (1) ascertain the unmet needs of our local business owners, (2) inventory the supports now given them, and therefore (3) determine what new supports need to be provided.

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 come from a family of small business owners. I spent summers helping my father at his computer repair shop by answering phones. His ability to make payroll was felt in our household every month he was unable to pay himself. As a small business owner myself, I too have had to skip on several months of paying myself, especially during this pandemic. The biggest difference between the challenges faced by large multinationals and small locally owned/operated businesses, as I see it, can be summarized this way: when the CEO of, say, Marriott International goes home at night, he's concerned about supply chain disruptions affecting maintenance operations in a growing number of hotels nationwide; and when the owner of Al's Deli goes home at night, she's concerned about supply chain disruptions affecting her ability to add quality cheese to her sandwiches, and also concerned about meeting payroll tomorrow at 9AM, her inability to find someone trustworthy enough to handle evening cash register duties, and the backed up toilet in the customer restroom. So, what three steps would I undertake upon being elected? 1) Eliminate the recordation tax. 2) Revamp our local economic development organization and services, to become more business friendly. 3) Liberalize zoning laws to make it easier for people to start home-based companies.

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 will ensure economic development that brings new businesses and jobs through the creation of incubators, through a focus on adding development specialists back to the regional service centers, and through addressing the county's transportation issues.

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 have been a strong proponent of incentivizing folks to change their preferred mode of transportation. As a former member of the state delegation to the Maryland General Assembly, we advocated to bring dollars back to the

County to fund the BRT and Purple Line. We also spoke in support of aid to the businesses who would suffer losses during the construction phase. As a business owner, I know first-hand the overwhelming feeling of doom and gloom when outside factors, which you have no control over, affect your bottom line to the point of even threatening your profitable existence. I am also able to balance that perspective with that of a solutions-oriented, common sense experienced legislator that looks to the overall collective public benefit as the overarching reason for pushing legislation forward.

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

I believe that the cultural shift of getting folks out of their cars and into mass transit will take some time, but it is not an impossible feat. I would prioritize mass transit programs that protect short term losses for businesses during the construction phase and will also look for innovative strategies that take into account commuter psychology that has worked in other countries to persuade folks to make a life altering decision in their transportation consumption. Dedicated bike lanes, as well as parking garages that incentivize the use of smaller and electric vehicles, would be another consideration.

- 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?

Continue to fund business loss programs during the construction phase, as well as a restorative marketing campaign to make sure that clients and consumers return to said businesses as soon as construction has been completed. It goes without saying during construction, making the entrances and access ways visible, is also key in ensuring that businesses can remain open post construction.

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 nonprofits 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, I believe that it is imperative that we receive the perspective of those who will be affected by a policy change. While a conflict of interest may arise, when implementing policy changes, it is in that debate and "sausage making" process that we can address unintended consequences.

- Would you require this analysis to include formal input from the Montgomery County Economic Development Corporation? Why or why not?

I am wary of creating *additional* requirements within the legislative process. While I would strongly encourage such analysis and input, I would not create additional legislative requirements that can delay or hold a bill. I believe in systems that make it easy for average citizens to participate in the policy change they would like to see.

- 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?

For the same reasons stated above, I would strongly encourage formal input from the individual area Chambers, but would stay away from additional barriers for the passage of strongly debated and carefully analyzed legislation.

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 the future of greater Silver Spring and Montgomery County is to invest in small and local businesses and to plan for future growth in our county. By championing policies that promote equity among business owners, access to procurement opportunities, and creating good paying jobs for our residents, I believe we can reduce congestion and school overcrowding and fill much of the vacant building space in the county. Over the next 5 years, the county council must work in constant collaboration with local businesses in order to make our community thrive. With the development of the East County Montgomery College Campus, there will be ample opportunities to invest in innovation hubs that bring academia, students, and innovative thinkers to Silver Spring, where, in conjunction with county investment, we can create one-stop-shops for small and medium size entrepreneurs who can find the resources they need to open and remain in their profitable business. We must support programs that provide additional incentives to attract innovative startups and entrepreneurship, innovation hubs that would connect new business owners with the resources they need to expand, and smart growth initiatives that will increase density at the core of our master plans, create more affordable housing, and protect small business owners from displacement by making sure that they are supported with financial assistance and investments from the community.