



GSSCC Questionnaire
Montgomery County Council Candidates

Name: Laurie-Anne Sayles

Email Address: info@LaurieAnneSayles.org

Web Address: www.LaurieAnneSayles.org

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

Number of Years Lived in that District: 15+ years

Party Affiliation: Democrat

Relevant Non-governmental Professional Experience/Positions Held:

- Appointed to the City of Gaithersburg's Economic Development Committee
- Appointed to the National League of Cities (NLC) Community & Economic Development (CED) Federal Advocacy Committee immediately at the 2017 City Summit in Charlotte, NC.
- I was appointed Chair of the National League of Cities (NLC) Community & Economic Development (CED) Federal Advocacy Committee at the organization's 2018 City Summit in Los Angeles.
 - I hosted the CED Committees Annual Meeting in 2019 in Gaithersburg.

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'm running to bring S.M.A.R.T. government to our county. S.M.A.R.T. government is my five-point policy platform endorsed by Former County Executive Ike Leggett. I will be a vocal champion for attracting the right mix of businesses to ensure a thriving economy as we recover from the pandemic.
 - As a Councilmember At-Large, I am committed to establishing better working relationships with our business community to ensure an open line of communication involved before creating laws and policies that will directly impact them. Instead of being the recipients of uninformed legislation, we should be working with our Chambers, state and federal partners, and public education systems to provide the appropriate financial support and training necessary to revive our economy and regain our standing as a premier place in the region that is open for business.

- o Moreover, I am committed to all of the above including allocating additional funding to support small businesses struggling to make it through the uncertainty of the pandemic:
 - Streamlining the regulatory and permitting process to provide transparency and clarity for all stakeholders will help staff and new and existing businesses navigate our resources more efficiently.
 - Working with the Office of Legislative Oversight (OLO) to investigate ways to lower the costs associated with doing business in our county
 - Increased investments in educational institutions to grow a highly trained, skilled workforce pipeline will position our county to attract new business and achieve further economic growth.
 - Allocating funds to help struggling small businesses and nonprofits facing revenue losses and provide resources to fund the reopening and sustainability of our local businesses.
 - Working with struggling businesses to devise a plan of action to make sure they are aware of all resources that can help them plan for the next phase of their business and options for retention.

2. The Silver Spring Central Business District was envisioned as 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 feel 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?
 - o As a Councilmember, our economy is reflective of what we prioritize. I know the importance of fostering a strong economy because I’ve worked with colleagues who understand that a thriving business economy happens in a few ways, mostly in how we allocate funding to attract, retain and grow economic development and zoning flexibility in our community.
 - o First find a new use and tenants for the old Discovery Place location. We also need to take into consideration that the COVID-19 Pandemic has changed the nature of work. It has been shown that some jobs can be done completely remote and employees have come to like working from home. We need to take these changes in work culture into consideration for any future plans we have.
 - o I am committed to working in partnership with city governments, local chambers of commerce, business service providers, banks, and Community Development Financial Institutions to:
 - o Encourage high density, mixed-use development near the downtown core to facilitate foot traffic for new and existing businesses.
 - o Use zoning initiatives such as overlay zones to encourage redevelopment and new housing development.
 - o Support the completion of multi-modal transportation systems to maximize transit options and access to public spaces like civic facilities that will help to revitalize our daytime economy.

3. The Planning Board’s Silver Spring Downtown and Adjacent Communities Plan’s only 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?

- Studies have shown that improving the public realm, like open public spaces within town centers, can boost commercial trading by up to 40% and generate significant private sector investment. While this approach should be part of the toolbox of recommendations for improvements that will positively impact the health, social, environmental, and economic outcomes of the SSDACP, there should be a more comprehensive strategy to respond to the dire state of the business core.
 - In order to encourage mixed-use development in Downtown Silver Spring and Adjacent Communities we need to ensure the area is walkable and there is enough green space to be aesthetically pleasing - green space also plays an important role in heat reduction during the summer. However, it is not enough. We need to assess what the needs of businesses and customers in the area are? Especially with bikeways. Is there a current demand for them? Is this an “if you build it they will come” situation? Do we have to encourage bike ridership? If so, how?
 - This recommendation is also pre-COVID-19 Pandemic thinking. The Pandemic has changed the nature of work. The adjustments that businesses have taken in light of COVID have proven that some jobs can be done completely remote and employees will demand to be able to work remotely. This will affect the physical space needs of business in the future. We need to take these changes into consideration.
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 “night time 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?
 - As a lawmaker in Gaithersburg, we worked with our police department to cultivate a safer community. I would support highly trained community policing efforts around the clock with an increased presence during peak hours or special events and will allow for the residents and businesses of Downtown Silver Spring to build relationships with the police and make their concerns known. Also, having a specialized force focused on Downtown Silver Spring will support the need for specialized training and knowledge of the area in order to perform their jobs more effectively.
 - I would also address the causes of crime - people are desperate and on edge because of the Pandemic - more police isn’t the silver bullet, we need to take a multi-faceted approach.
 - Moreover, there is a rise in homelessness in the area so we need to increase our supply and access to affordable housing and wrap around services to help them with their issues. There also is a persistent lack of social services to handle the needs of people coming to Progress Place. The County has allocated funding for this response, but I have not seen any meaningful progress. As a proponent for improving the nighttime economy, I would also be supportive of a set closing time for restaurants operating as bars and nightclubs, and hookah bars, if the evidence shows that keeping business open later leads to more crime and not just changing when the crime happens. We also need to address noise pollution - people do live in Downtown Silver Spring. If we can utilize law enforcement to ensure a reduction in violence without having a set closing time I’m all for it. My primary concern is the safety and quality of life of the residents of Downtown Silver Spring. If having a set closing time will make them safer I’ll support it.

5. GSSCC believes that a thriving business community brings prosperity for all 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 a member of the City of Gaithersburg’s Economic Development Committee and Chair of the National League of Cities Community and Economic Development Committee, I’ve supported the following initiatives/legislation to foster innovative growth, increase the tax base, and attract and grow our business sector as follows:
 - Enhancing the efforts of the Montgomery County Economic Development Corporation to reclaim our standing as the leading county in the region
 - Maintaining equitable distribution of recovery resources. Finding tenants and a use for the former Discovery Place location
 - Encouraging mixed use development. Ensuring that the Purple line development is done in an efficient and equitable manner
 - Promoting public-private partnerships in workforce training and development to prepare youth and adults for the workplace of the future by reconnecting unemployed and underemployed workers and active retirees to the workforce
 - Facilitating the county’s position between federal agencies and corporate offices within our boundary and the region to further develop opportunities across our growing regional biotech corridor
 - Develop job creation goals and measure the effectiveness of the Montgomery Works One-Stop career system to address unemployment.
 - Preserve and expand economic empowerment through research partnerships with public and private entities
 - Promote and support policies that will help increase and diversify employers and small businesses
 - Facilitate and maintain a high-quality public education system from cradle to career and beyond that support student career preparation, targeting areas of high need in the region
 - federal funding that encourages collaboration between local governments and community-based nonprofit organizations, community development corporations, and the business community
 - Using Business Data to Attract Private Investment Using a coordinated approach, the federal government should provide necessary information and data to local governments to help them strengthen their markets and bring their local economies back into the mainstream.
 - The federal Renewal Community/ Empowerment Zone/Enterprise Community (RZ-EZ-EC) initiative, with a goal towards job creation and retention, encouragement of local minority ownership, and participation in new businesses and joint ventures.
 - Expanding the Small Business Administration and Economic Development Administration programs that provide start-up capital and management training to U.S. companies;
 - Prioritizing public-private partnerships to develop apprenticeship programs that will prepare students for in-demand careers of the future
 - Expanding access to broadband technology to improve access and engagement between educators, parents, students, and the community
 - Ensuring our lifelong learners have access to opportunities conducive to aging in place, including volunteering, socializing, and recreational activities

- Promoting housing policies like down payment assistance programs that center mobility upward by incentivizing homeownership pathways so people can live closer to where they work
 - Supporting residential projects that create more housing options and homes in our county, prioritizing housing near jobs and transit while helping us meet our regional goals for an additional 10,000 units by 2030
6. Many of our small- and medium-sized business members feel that the policies adopted by the 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 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.
- Using CDBG funds to create a local relief fund with a mix of zero- or low-interest loans and grants would help small business owners address costly repairs like upgrading the facades and exteriors of their stores or increasing their energy efficiency.
 - Evaluating the impact, needs, and priorities of small businesses through surveys to see how the government can tailor support to help retain and grow small businesses, especially women and minority-owned businesses that might face structural barriers and those whose first language is not English or who lack consistent access to the internet or social media.
 - Access to information is priceless, so creating a central, online repository for resources could serve as a one-stop-shop for resources, tools, and information for small businesses that is updated daily with relevant information from the state and federal agencies, as well as with step-by-step guidance on how restaurants can transition from meal service to delivery, how to apply for SBA loans, and how to contact local SBA-approved lenders or other local business support organizations.
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 committed to ensuring economic development that brings new businesses and jobs to the East County/Rt. 29 Corridor by:
 - Providing incentives to redevelop and reinvest in the Route 29 Corridor in Eastern Montgomery County while also supporting the County's goal of creating a new life sciences center
 - Ensuring adequate infrastructure to support the land uses, including various transportation improvements and workforce development.
8. The Chamber supports a balanced approach to transportation policies that take 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?
 - While THRIVE has caused a lot of controversies, it has sparked a critical discussion about what our vision for Montgomery County should be and how zoning changes could facilitate those changes. Zoning changes to address our county's speedy population growth have to take a holistic approach to plan and develop our county for future success. Projects that create a diversity of housing types to address housing affordability and housing supply to close the 30,000 affordable housing unit deficit. Increasing pathways to homeownership and transit-oriented development position our county for regional economic success when people can work closer to where they live.
 - Finally, suppose we want to emerge in economic competitiveness across the region. In that case, we must make strategic investments in multimodal transportation in alignment with land use and other infrastructure to improve the efficient and reliable movement of goods and services. We have to facilitate investments in a more dynamic way to attract the right mix of businesses to expand our tax base and provide job opportunities for the future workforce living near work and play.
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?
 - 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?
 - While the Chamber of Commerce is a major stakeholder in this process they are not a government agency and this might give a veto power to an unelected group even if it is a membership organization. I would encourage their input but not require it. We should make it so they have the same ability to provide input as any other stakeholder but they shouldn't be given veto power.
 - I would require that this analysis include interviews and discussions with actual business owners and stakeholders like the Montgomery County Economic Development Corporation, the County Chamber of Commerce, and the individual area Chambers because anything without us is not for us. We must break down the silos and bring everyone together to understand better how policy decisions impact our business community before introduction.
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 and Montgomery County is that we harness all of our incredible resources far and wide to create a thriving economy that is competitive, in-demand, self-sustaining, attractive, innovative, clean, and safe. We have the tools and resources; we just need the political will to plan and grow greater Silver Spring and our county more efficiently.

- My S.M.A.R.T. agenda, which is an acronym for the policy ideas that will successfully position our County to compete in the economy of the future by focusing on the following key priorities:
 - Strengthening 21st century learning from cradle to career and beyond
 - Making a living in Montgomery County more affordable
 - Advancing sustainable local food production in the Ag Reserve
 - Recovering from the pandemic and revitalizing the economy
 - Tackling climate change through multi-modal transportation infrastructure