



GSSCC Questionnaire
Montgomery County Council Candidates

Name: **Kate Stewart**

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

Number of Years Lived in that District: **27**

Party Affiliation: **Democrat**

Relevant Non-governmental Professional Experience/Positions Held: **Co-Owner of Beldon, Russonello & Stewart, a research and consulting firm (1992 to 2012); Executive Vice President, Advocates for Youth, a nonprofit with national and international programs (2012 to 2015); Principal, Conway Strategic, a communications and consulting firm (2015 to present). I have also served as an adjunct professor at American University and a member of the Urban Institute's Internal Review Board. In addition to this non-governmental work, since 2015, I have served as the Mayor of Takoma Park and I am currently the Vice-Chair of the Metropolitan Washington Area Council of Governments and on the Board of the Mayors Innovation Project. I have also served three years as the Co-Chair of the National League of Cities Race Equity And Leadership Council (REAL).**

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)?
 - **To emerge from the pandemic as a stronger County, we need our businesses to recover. We need to create an environment that allows our existing businesses to get back on their feet, grow and thrive. We also need an environment that attracts new business to the County. This starts with listening to our businesses about their challenges and working with them to find ways to overcome these challenges. And, it means removing unnecessary barriers that can make it difficult to open, expand or adapt a business. Too often, good business ideas are delayed or abandoned because County processes are too long, too cumbersome, or too uncertain to meet real world needs.**

While the County did provide some relief during the pandemic, it was slow to release some funding including federal funding. In late 2020, it came to light that the County Executive was sitting on \$45.6 million of Federal Relief that was intended for immediate distribution. The County needs to do better at reacting quickly to a crisis and getting help to people and businesses when they need it. In Takoma Park, we made it a priority to reach out to business quickly when the pandemic first started and were able to provide assistance before the State or County. While the amounts were not large (given our limited

budget), we were able to provide businesses with support and much needed hope when they needed it most. We need the same sort of nimble and quick action at the county level.

- **As COVID in some form is likely to remain with us for the long term, we need to help businesses adapt. This means providing clear actionable guidance based on the latest science. Too often, the County’s COVID guidance ignored large segments of the community, including renters and businesses. If COVID becomes a longer-term concern, we need to look at our public infrastructure and how it can support long-term changes. We’ve seen ways in which governments, like Takoma Park, have supported business by closing streets and opening up public spaces for expanded uses. Regardless of how long COVID remains with us, we need to learn from what has worked over the last few years so that our infrastructure supports a vibrant and successful community. We also need to coordinate with surrounding jurisdictions as much as possible to provide consistent and clear guidance to businesses. As Vice-Chair of the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments, I have worked with colleagues across the DMV to address issues such as housing, equity, and sustainability. As a County, we too often go it alone. If COVID remains a long-term issue, we should work (where possible) to align our policies with those of our neighboring jurisdictions so that businesses and consumers alike have clear expectations.**
- **Financial support for businesses needs to be part of budgets and planning in the county. We need to work with businesses to understand their needs, and support them through temporary periods of crisis and dislocation so that we can help set them up for long term success. That’s why I worked with Delegate Wilkins to secure state money in support for businesses impacted by Purple Line construction.**

With the passage of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, which includes over \$500 billion in new resources, local governments need to be ready to act to support new projects that will improve our infrastructure, provide new affordable housing, and grow our economy. The County needs to be prepared and if the Executive isn’t planning ahead, the Council needs to insert into the budget additional County staff or contracts with organizations ready to disburse funds or services.

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?

Montgomery County has lagged behind neighboring jurisdictions in terms of economic development. I am Vice-Chair of the Board of the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments and see what other jurisdictions are doing. We need to take several steps to improve our economic vitality and regional competitiveness. Among the actions we need to take:

- ⊘ **Build new economic development expertise in the county government so that we move from “marketing” to actually planning and attracting business. We should not just approve individual projects, but implement a plan to grow our economy.**
- ⊘ **Reduce needless red tape that makes it harder (and longer) for small businesses to move from dream to reality. We’ve fast-track processes for individual projects, but need to do this across the board.**
- ⊘ **Move from talking about our transportation infrastructure to actually building it, including BRT, the Purple Line & MARC.**
- ⊘ **Promote (and amend zoning to permit) more and more-dense, mixed-use development in transportation rich areas like downtown Silver Spring.**
- ⊘ **Incentivize new businesses to locate in Silver Spring.**

Specifically, Silver Spring is central business district for the entire County and needs to be treated as such. As someone who lives just steps away from DTSS, I have seen the ups and downs over the last two decades. In the short term we need to address the basics – trees, sidewalks, lights, and mitigating the construction impacts.

We need a true champion on the County Council who will consistently advocate for its businesses and look to work to attract new ones.

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?

It is critically important to improve the public realm to build a more prosperous, inclusive and sustainable County. As noted in the prior question we need to do much more to attract businesses to our County, and in particular, to Silver Spring. I also have the same question about the current Planning Board's Plan. The current plan states the changes recommended will add 44,000 jobs – a 50% increase – but does not provide any specifics. As I note above, we need to revisit how we are doing economic development in the County. I know personally from my experience in Takoma Park how much you can accomplish when you have dedicated Economic Development staff who are actively working to attract new businesses to an area.

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?
 - **A new police station is not the best near-term solution to address the increase in violent crime in downtown Silver Spring. A new station is a capital intensive and long-term project that would not timely resolve our current issues. That doesn't mean a future downtown station or substation should not be considered. But, if I am elected to the Council I would want to evaluate the costs and benefits of building a new station (e.g., could the money more effectively be spent on other crime reduction efforts) and how it would fit within the Police Department's long-term strategy for developing and maintaining physical locations.**

To address the immediate issues, we need to invest in nearer term solutions that stem the increase in crime much more quickly than a station. This involves understanding the root causes of the increase and finding solutions to address those causes. Some of those solutions may require targeted police work. However, we also need to look at ways that we can increase safety through efforts that do not require additional police presence -- for example, by increasing the number of redshirts and other community support resources in the area.

- **Montgomery County's rules on closing times should not be an outlier when compared to neighboring jurisdictions and I support aligning our closing times with neighboring counties and the District. At the same time, we'll need to listen to the concerns of local businesses to make sure any changes are carried out thoughtfully with an understanding of how they will impact these businesses but we also need to look at the impact on the entire community and I am supporter of stricter closing times.**
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)?

I support increasing the tax base to provide public services and believe that a thriving business community is key to our County's current and future success. I believe in a fair and progressive tax system and have found too often places where our tax policies do not reflect our values. For example, when I became Mayor of

Takoma Park, I heard from local businesses that the City’s commercial personal property tax unfairly burdened certain businesses (such as jewelry stores that maintained a large non-real estate property inventory). I worked to remove that tax and pushed for the change to be made immediately and not phased in.

To expand Montgomery County’s tax base, as noted above, I believe that we should:

- € **Build new economic development expertise in the county government so that we move from “marketing” to actually planning and attracting business. We should not just approve individual projects, but implement a plan to grow our economy.**
- € **Reduce needless red tape that makes it harder (and longer) for small businesses to move from dream to reality. We’ve fast-track processes for individual projects, but need to do this across the board.**
- € **Move from talking about our transportation infrastructure to actually building it, including BRT, the Purple Line & MARC.**
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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.

As a former small business owner, I know what it’s like to worry about bringing in business, paying overhead, and providing a stable pay-check for employees who support families of their own. I believe that the County is currently failing our small and medium-sized business and that we need to do more to support them.

First, we need to remove barriers for small and medium-sized businesses. While the County has made some improvements over the years, the permitting process remains a nightmare. The County should be working to help businesses open quickly and efficiently and avoid unnecessary roadblocks. We should become a partner, not a barrier in getting businesses up, running and growing.

Second, we need to expand programs that give local entrepreneurs, particularly Black and Brown businesses, the needed assistance to address the historic barriers they face or when they are unfairly impacted by events outside of their control. In Takoma Park, for example, we worked to expand grant and loan programs with the Latino Economic Development Corporation to help small businesses. I also fought to provide obtain state relief funds for businesses in Takoma Park impacted by Purple Line construction so that these businesses can survive the construction and continue to grow and support our community.

Third, we need to create a supportive community for businesses. This means treating businesses as part of our community, listening to their needs, and working with them to enable them to succeed. It also means making sure our public infrastructure and spaces encourage and support businesses and entrepreneurship. There are little things we can do that are nevertheless meaningful. For example, in Takoma Park, at the start of the pandemic, we closed down streets and worked with local businesses to create public spaces that encouraged local business and community members to interact. These spaces helped grow our vibrant downtown area, supported our business, and provided public areas for our community to shop, eat, or just meet. We also worked with businesses in the Crossroads Area to obtain public funds for façade improvements and public art. And, as noted above, we advocated for our businesses with the state to help them mitigate the adverse impacts of Purple Line construction.

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?

The County and, in particular, the current County Executive have for too long ignored East County projects. While I have not been involved in the ongoing discussions, Viva White Oak, along with the new Adventist Hospital, appear to provide an opportunity to increase investment in the East County and spur economic development, boost housing construction, and create the type of mixed-use projects that enable people to live, work and play in their neighborhood. It is important that the County prioritize these projects. Equally important, it is necessary for the County to build the infrastructure so that it does not need to “fast track” specific projects. Rather fast decision making on projects must become the norm, not the exception.

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?
 - **Transportation Approach and Options: My approach to evaluating transit options requires us to look at equity, sustainability and prosperity. We do need to balance transportation options to make sure people can get to work, shop and play, but we need to do so in a way that promotes equity and long-term sustainability. This means, for example, investing in public transportation and making electric charging stations more available to support to move toward electric vehicles that is happening across the country.**
 - **Purple Line: As we have done in Takoma Park, we need to work with businesses that are being adversely impacted by the Purple Line and other projects. This means understanding how to make the conditions easier during construction (for example by ensuring that parking lots are not blocked) and providing temporary financial assistance for business that are adversely impacted by the project. I fought hard to for the state allocate (and subsequently unlock) money to mitigate the businesses impact of 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 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?

To be successful as a County, we need businesses to succeed. To help them do so, we need to listen to them. That means making sure we understand the potential impact that legislation has on them. We need to make sure that there are adequate mechanisms to receive and consider input from business owners, the Montgomery County Economic Development Corporation and local Chambers of Commerce and I support creating such mechanisms. And, I support early engagement on issues.

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 that we start to live up to our potential. We become a place where young people can come to find jobs or stay on after going to school to raise their families and can afford to do so. We are place where people

can age in place and that means staying in the same area and downsizing if that is what they want. We get there by embracing and encouraging economic growth. Supporting our small businesses and respecting them as a core constituent in our County. We like to say Montgomery County is a great place to live. We need to start talking about and making it a reality that Montgomery County is a great place to work and to open and grow a business.