

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR COUNTY COUNCIL CANDIDATES

Responses of Ilaya Hopkins, Democratic Candidate, Council District 1

Budget & Tax

1. Do you support raising revenues through more progressive tax and fee structures to preserve County services and programs instead of focusing solely on making cuts? How specifically would you do this without unduly adding to the burden of moderate and modest income County residents?

Montgomery County residents have long been willing to pay taxes knowing that they would receive high quality, cost effective services in return. In recent years this understanding has broken down, as the County Council has used tax and fee hikes to cover a worsening structural budget deficit. While cuts in 2006 may have been painful, a small amount of pain then would easily have prevented the much greater pain we now feel.

Service cuts disproportionately impact our moderate and modest income residents. We burden them with closed libraries, fewer buses, rougher road, and larger class sizes. The dire budget situation forces us to choose among programs when we could have avoided cuts through wiser financial choices. To this end, I intend to pursue a sustainable long-term budget for the county which focuses on achieving goals rather than merely maintaining funding levels. I firmly believe that by thoroughly examining county operations more critically we can achieve the same, or better, outcomes at a lower cost.

2. Do you support, at the state level, imposition of a 'millionaire's tax,' requiring upper income residents to pay higher taxes?

I support a progressive tax structure because I believe those who have benefited greatly from our society have a greater obligation to give back. It is a balancing act, however, to ensure that it is not so punitive as to drive people away.

3. If you believe that some cutbacks are necessary, please explain how you would prioritize cuts to the County budget, including cuts to "safety net" programs, education cuts, and other human services. What specific programs and services would you cut?

The County Council and its staff, together with the County Executive, have the information and the ability to make substantive changes to the way we operate. The current council missed an opportunity to act decisively this year to put us on a more sustainable path moving forward. I will work to remedy this problem and make county government more efficient, particularly focusing on streamlining the management levels, allowing us to maintain service delivery at a lower cost.

In addition to strengthening and diversifying revenues, we must use this budget crisis as an opportunity to address the structural deficit of our budget. Failure to do so will guarantee another crisis down the road. Over 80% of the budget is spent on compensation. If we do not work with the many unions to find ways to manage this expenditure over time, we will simply

not be able to offer the full range of programs and services our county's residents and businesses have come to expect. We must be committed to starting work now on how to reorganize and restructure people and programs so that these ideas can be incorporated into the FY12 budget.

Affordable Housing

1. What programs and policies do you support to preserve the existing stock of affordable rental housing in the County and stop its further decline? Do you have a plan for increasing the number of affordable housing units in the County? If yes, please explain.

Thirty years ago, county leadership had the vision to create the Agricultural Reserve that protects 30 percent of county lands. Today, we have a growing population that will need more housing, schools, jobs, better parks, and recreation options. The challenge is to evolve in a way that preserves our green spaces and neighborhoods, while also accommodating our expanding practical needs.

To accommodate this we need a comprehensive countywide strategy that focuses on redevelopment around transit hubs. Workforce and affordable housing needs to be part of that redevelopment strategy. By encouraging more housing stock at a variety of price points (apartments, condos and town homes), we can better meet both the needs of our workforce today and the workforce we anticipate in the future. Based my discussions with the construction community, I believe builders and apartment owners understand the need for affordable housing and the benefits it can bring to the community. I am optimistic that affordable housing can be made a win-win for all, ultimately creating a more vibrant and diverse community.

2. Do you support mandatory reporting of rents and other increases by landlords with 4 or more units? Do you support making the County's voluntary rent guidelines mandatory based on the cost-of-living, or some other method of rent stabilization with reasonable exceptions?

I support mandatory reporting of rents to allow the county to make more informed decisions on housing policy. I am not yet convinced that mandatory rent guidelines would effectively address the need for affordable housing.

3. Have you read the March 2010 Tenants Work Group Report? (http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/Content/EXEC/TWG/pdf/twg_report_3-2010.pdf) Which, if any, of the recommendations contained in the Report do you support?

I have read and am familiar with the Tenants Work Group report. Having worked on issues related to aging in place and other concerns of our senior community, I am particularly interested in how seniors can afford to stay in apartments and how they can expect good services from landlords. Establishing best practices of communications and ensuring that this part of our population is not unduly burdened by rapid increases in rent is a key issue.

4. Do you support State enabling legislation which would allow Montgomery County to

pass county-level “just cause eviction” legislation to allow evictions only for specified reasons such as non-payment of rent or on-site criminal activity? If the legislation is passed at the state level, would you support just cause eviction legislation in Montgomery County?

I support, generally, a just cause eviction statute, although my support would depend on the details of the bill. I would expect any legislation to also guarantee timely evictions once ordered.

Transportation & Infrastructure

1. Do you support the expansion of public transit, including building the Purple Line, CCT, and Bus Rapid Transit?

Yes. I support the Purple Line along the master plan alignment, and believe both the CCT and the proposed BRT system should be pursued.

2. What other ways would you expand the building and usage of public transportation in the County?

We must be able to handle long-term projects such as the CCT and Purple Line without foregoing maintenance and short-term improvements to our existing transportation systems. I am committed to doing the unglamorous work needed to improve our existing transportation systems – Ride-On and Metro. These systems are already strained at the very time that the network most needs to operate more efficiently. Ride-On has been at capacity since 2004 due to a lack of bus garage space. WMATA has \$11 B in capital needs over the next decade and the system will deteriorate significantly without at least half of that funding. I find lack of attention to WMATA by the council particularly alarming, both because six Metro stations lie in District 1 and because Metro is a key component to county's development. As a councilmember I will focus on providing Ride-On capacity and work vigorously with local, state, and regional partners to secure funding and support for Metro.

3. Do you support tax or other incentives to promote telework, vanpools, and carpools?

Yes. I believe tax incentives and other direct support for these types of programs ultimately prove worth while by providing reduced congestion, as well as, an improved overall quality of life.

Education

1. What measures do you support to maintain the high quality of education in Montgomery County Public Schools, given the current budget situation?

As the ultimate authority responsible for the budget, the County Council must understand and be a partner in how funding is spent by MCPS. My opponent has stated that “we give them the money but we can’t control what they do with it.” I believe this is a fundamentally irresponsible attitude and misses an opportunity to forge a more collaborative relationship between the council and the Board of Education. The council is responsible for creating a sustainable

budget and must take that responsibility seriously.

Based on currently available information, I believe savings can be found in the school system's management and overhead, allowing savings without impacting instructional or classroom support services. As a councilmember, I will work to build a closer relationship with the Board of Education, making the MCPS budget more transparent and insuring that critical wrap-around services, funded outside the MCPS budget, are able to continue to giving students a better chance at success in the classroom,

New Development

1. Do you support the recent increases in school and transportation impact fees?

Transportation impact fees, as currently structured, are not effective. While I find the concept a good one, fees currently flow into the general fund with no guarantee they will be used to mitigate the relevant impact. Impact fees are only charged for multi-unit buildings, not single-family homes, even though the turnover in many of our settled single-family communities have driven increases in traffic and school enrollment. If we rely solely on impact fees to fund expansions to services we will remain forever behind the curve. I believe we must reexamine the impact fee system and ensure it effectively accomplishes its goals before we discuss the right level for the fees.

2. Do you support assessments of infrastructure, service, health, environmental, human, and small business impacts prior to approval of new developments?

Yes. When the council and public have more information, better, more effective, decisions can be made with fewer unintended side-effects.

3. What changes in the County Master Plan do you support to promote smart, sensible, environmentally sound, and managed growth?

Land use planning and the approval process for master plans that have time horizons of 20 to 30 years is a key responsibility of the County Council. Both of the plans in question lay out a vision for the future. The White Flint Plan leverages existing transit infrastructure and better utilizes the land around the metro. Science City attempts to create a hub of activity around the bio sciences and will rely on new infrastructure to be successful. The common theme of both is that they must grow with transit-first development, putting transit improvements in place ahead of development. Doing so ensures we have the transit capacity to handle new development and prevents congestion that occurs when if growth comes but transit is delayed

We need to encourage redevelopment and infill development that is better than what we have today – more transit oriented, more sustainable, more walkable, more diverse, and more integrated. While our master plans intend to encourage these qualities, our more detailed rules and regulations often work against them. For example, complicated and obtuse measurements of traffic, such as PAMR, emphasize “vehicle throughput” – how many cars get through an intersection - rather than transit service, walkability, or the quality of the street overall. If we want to create transit oriented spaces we cannot use car oriented tools to do so.

Looking ahead, this same vision and commitment needs to be realized in other parts of the county as well, most notably in the White Oak area in the eastern part of the county.

4. How do you propose to prevent displacement in communities along the route of the Purple Line, such as Long Branch and Langley Park, if the Purple Line is built?

The residents of areas such as Long Branch and Langley Park deserve to enjoy the benefits of the Purple Line without being displaced. If residents of an area are priced out of their homes and businesses we have not truly improved an area, but instead made a new area which disregards the original population. I believe we can mitigate this effect if we fully consider and weigh such consequences before approving new zoning and development. Our plans must include adequate, affordable housing, space for local small businesses, and the preservation of existing apartments where possible. I believe we must maintain the continuity of our communities even as they adapt and grow.

Elections

1. If State enabling legislation is passed, would you support campaign finance reform in Montgomery County, including publicly funded campaigns for County races?

Yes.

2. Do you support such State enabling legislation? Yes.
3. Do you support legislation making monthly reporting of campaign contributions mandatory for candidates for County office? Whether such legislation is passed or not, will you pledge to make such monthly reports in this and future campaigns?

Yes. The current reporting schedule significantly reduces the usefulness of reports to the public. I would be willing to make such a pledge in future campaigns if my opponent would do the same.

4. Do you support issuing a publicly-financed voter guide, prepared by an independent body, with candidate statements and information that would go to all registered voters?

While I believe the voter guides currently issued by organizations such as the Washington Post and the League of Women Voters are highly useful, I am open to a public voter guide.

Immigration

1. Do you support equal access to education and other County services for all County residents regardless of immigration status?

The County is legally required to provide an adequate public education to all students.

2. Do you support the policy of not asking or checking immigration status unless there is a felony charge arrest?

County Police oppose a policy that requires checking immigration status as it would create distrust of the police and harm efforts to prevent and solve crime. I

trust and agree with this assessment.

3. Do you support free, readily available English language classes and other education programs to help immigrants become full participants in the civic life of our County?

Yes. We strengthen our community when we give residents tools to become more involved in it. Our students see particular benefits when their parents are empowered to become active in their children's education.

4. Do you support legislation making Montgomery County a “sanctuary county?” (In a sanctuary county, no agent, officer or employee of the county may assist the U.S. Bureau of Immigration and Customs Enforcement in the investigation or arrest of any persons for violation of the U.S. immigration and nationality laws.)

Agricultural Reserve

1. Do you support the protection of the County Agricultural Reserve including additional protections against development for the Reserve or do you think current restrictions are sufficient?

I fully support the agricultural reserve – it is one of the features of our area which makes Montgomery County such a distinct, high-quality place to live. Current policies, such as the child lot rules, need reexamination and revision to ensure that they are effectively protecting the reserve.

Other

1. Why should an organization such as ours, which supports progressive policies and representatives, endorse you in this race?

I am a lifelong progressive who has spent ten years in this community putting my values into action. Progressives are not dogmatic – we value open debate, honest dialogue, and respect for all people. These are the values I have worked hard to foster in my civic work and will continue to practice on the County Council.