

QUESTIONNAIRES FOR COUNTY COUNCIL CANDIDATES

Response of Marc Elrich, At-Large Democratic Candidate

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?**

I support more progressive taxation. I supported Ike's proposal several years ago to use a higher rate when the Council exceeded the property tax Charter Limit and give a higher rebate to homeowners which would have actually reduced the typical tax burden. I lost the vote 8-1. I supported getting the authority from the State, through an Al Carr bill, to have different tax rates on commercial and residential property which only Phil Andrews and I supported on the council. Right now, our local options are very limited. Neither businesses nor residents in this economic environment can absorb much of a tax hit.

I think it's critical that we use existing resources more wisely. I sense that people have a growing distrust of government and its ability to be prudent, and so are reluctant to hand over more money. Before a consideration of raising taxes, we need to make sure we're spending money wisely. All parts of the budget – County government, MCPS, Montgomery College, and the Planning Department – need to be scrutinized for greater operating efficiencies. We need to reorganize County government, something I have been proposing for a number of years. I believe we need outside consultants to reorganize business management and workflow, so that we have an optimized work structure. Nothing that's been done to date gets down into the internal workings of our agencies and that is where we need to go. If we do that, we should be able to deliver existing services for fewer dollars.

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

Yes. But we'd do well to study the result of the local tax. It's been argued that our loss of income is attributable to a loss of millionaires who left the State. Many of them have houses elsewhere and it's not difficult to pick an alternate house in a different state as your primary residence. There's some question as to whether that's what happened or whether the loss of tax revenue from this bracket is exclusively attributable to the loss of capital gains income. There's also some concern that an aggressive millionaire's tax may deter wealthier individuals from choosing to move to Montgomery County. We should carefully balance the rate so as not to shoot ourselves in the foot if the consequences actually have a negative impact on revenues.

Our tax problem is really more fundamental in that we do not have a progressive income tax. I favor the restructuring of the entire tax code to address this.

- 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?

I want to approach this by looking first at restructuring before we cut programs. It would be wrong to cut programs that work before we first try to eliminate as much waste as possible. The education budget grew to an even larger portion of our total expenditures this year and their cut was minimal compared to all other departments. My goal, in general, is to reduce safety net services as little as possible. We've made all the easy cuts. And then, we made many painful cuts this year because we must balance the budget. If we have to meet the State's requirement for school Maintenance of Effort (which mandates that we spend at least as much as we did last year per student) and we have pledged to meet the bonding agency requirements for higher reserves (which will ultimately increase from 6% to 10% of the budget), these two factors alone will reduce money available for services. See my response under the education section for more discussion of this issue.

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.**

We need to preserve existing affordable housing and recognize that it's an important part of the affordable housing puzzle. While I support the MPDU program, we will not be able to provide sufficient housing through the program because the demand far exceeds that supply. It is cheaper to buy and rehab existing housing than it is to construct new housing, and we're losing affordable units faster than we can create them under any scenario. We need to provide additional funds for this because we get more bang for our investment by retaining more of what we have than continuing a policy where we lose far more units than we build. We also need to keep rents affordable in our county (see #2 below for further discussion), and we need to continue to enforce the housing code to keep our housing stock in order.

We also have to think creatively. One opportunity that I have identified, and that the County and a developer have been evaluating, is to look at existing County garages for the potential to add units above the garages that could be affordable workforce housing. Tentatively, some possible spots were identified. It might provide an opportunity to allow developers to more affordably create units, compared to the cost of requiring them to be built in high rises.

- 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?**

Yes, I believe accurate reporting of rents can be done in a manner that is not burdensome to landlords and would provide useful information. The current reporting of rents is inaccurate and yet it is used for important policy and planning decisions. Yes, I believe that rent stabilization can be designed so that landlords get a fair return on their investments and tenants are not faced with extraordinarily high rent increases.

- 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?

Yes, I have read the report. In fact, my staff and I participated in Tenant Work Group (TWG) meetings because I was the representative from the Council on the TWG. After a report from a county affordable housing task force, which did not have any tenant representation, I asked the County Executive to convene a group to review and assess issues important to tenants. I comment CE Leggett for creating the TWG and allowing it to independently develop its recommendations. I support all the recommendations in the report; however, I think implementation must be prioritized. Some can be implemented quickly; some should be set in motion soon, and some may take more time and more financial resources than are currently available.

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?

Yes, I support just cause eviction legislation at the state level and legislation for our County. I have heard too many stories of tenants’ not having their leases renewed because they have been vocal in asking for appropriate maintenance and services. These are tenants who pay their rents on time, follow the rules and are good neighbors, but they are deemed “troublemakers” or not liked by the landlords. Landlords can require them to move at the end of lease without having to give any justification.

Transportation & Infrastructure

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

Yes, I support all three. I have proposed a county-wide Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) system that has support from business, residential and environmental groups. My proposal is currently under review by county and consulting transportation planners. It is the only economically viable way to address congestion and have a positive environmental impact as well. Allowing the County’s roads to deteriorate into parking lots, which is where we’re heading, is not good for anyone: not the business community or our residents. We need to give people real alternatives to their cars; the current public transit alternatives are insufficient to encourage “choice riders” (those who can choose between their cars and using public transit) to leave their cars at home. The BRT system I propose would include the CCT line, and it would integrate with the Metrorail and light-rail Purple Line stations. BRT is relatively inexpensive to build, and it can be implemented quickly. The result is a high-quality system built efficiently.

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

As I discuss above, we need a public transportation system that works well. We also need to look at controlling the development of long-term parking spaces to reduce congestion in commercial areas and build ridership on public transit. Long-term parking should be limited in

certain areas. Precious dollars should not be used building parking garages that we don't want people to use.

I serve on the PHED committee on the Council and was deeply involved in the review of the White Flint master plan, which recently passed the Council. The White Flint plan encourages pedestrian-, bike-, and transit-oriented development and redevelopment through appropriately located increases in density. The Planning Board originally proposed a 39% non-auto share of trips and the impact on the roads would have been to turn them into parking lots - negatively affecting tens of thousands of people who were neither coming to or from White Flint. The solution which I pushed, and that the Council adopted, increased the non-auto mode share in White Flint to **50%**, increased the target for non-auto mode share in 6 other areas in order to take more pass through trips off the road, and maintained congestion near current bad levels rather than making it worse. The developers and residents in the White Flint area also support putting BRT down the center of Rockville Pike in order to provide adequate transit access. The White Flint master plan that passed the Council was a win for everyone: it increases transit usage, which is a desirable Smart Growth outcome, and it did not completely wreck the road network for all the other people who must use it.

A BRT public transportation backbone system would also change the operation of our Ride On buses. Instead of taking long inefficient routes, they would 'pulse' in and out of the neighborhoods to the BRT stations on shorter runs more frequently. The biggest impediments to attracting 'choice riders' are infrequency of service, on-time reliability and speed of the trip relative to the same trip in a car. BRT with reconfigured Ride On would significantly improve all these factors.

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

Yes, a variety of strategies can be used to reduce traffic congestion and help the environment.

Education

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

We need a time out from MOE so that the Board of Education can do the kind of thorough review that I'd like to see the County undertake, without fear of being punished by the State. The original intent of MOE was to strongly encourage local jurisdictions not to supplant local education funds with funds the State adds to the education budget. But now, perversely, if MCPS were to find savings that did not impact student instruction, but reduced spending below MOE requirements, the State would then take tens of millions of dollars away from the school system in addition to whatever cuts were identified. This is an untenable situation. If we don't change it, a successful outcome is hard to imagine.

We need to work closely with the school board before the budget is developed. We must have a common understanding of likely resources and what other claims there are on those funds. There's no way to separate out school funding from the funding challenge in general - it competes, for example, directly with social services and public safety, so we have to find a balance between all of the programs that our residents need- including our children when they are not in school.

New Development

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

Yes. I was very involved in crafting the increases in 2007 so that new development helps pay the infrastructure costs, including schools and transportation needs, that accompany development. This was no small accomplishment. The 2007 law requires payments from developers to the schools if the new development is estimated to result in significant overcrowding in the short- and longer-term.

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

I believe the master plan process should look at development of areas and assess what is appropriate for those communities. I don't think Master Plans currently are adequate in addressing small business needs and focus too much on the attraction of large corporations. I've supported the broadening of the scope of the definition of adequate public facilities to include a broader range of services and associated facilities, and I support Councilmember Duchy Trachtenberg's proposal to require health assessments of the impacts of new development.

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

First of all, include the proposed BRT system in the County Master Plan of highways so that it has to be considered in all of the Master plans. Second, adopt a sound growth policy that links infrastructure required in the Master plans to our capital improvements budget. We need a process that ties spending and priority master plan projects together. I favor reasonable density increases around transit, but if our goal is to promote "smart growth" then, just as it makes sense to locate more density there, we should be willing to reduce density in dumb growth areas of the county. Otherwise these cheaper parcels compete economically for development dollars against smart growth areas resulting in sprawl. We should facilitate the choice of smart growth destinations.

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?

Many of those communities are rental communities. With rent stabilization and just cause legislation, property owners will be less able to displace existing communities. We could require one for one replacement of affordable units when parcels are redeveloped – a no net loss of affordable housing policy.

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, How fast can we do this?

2. Do you support such State enabling legislation?

Yes, I've supported it every year.

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?

I would support reporting of contributions on a monthly or bi-monthly basis. I'm reluctant, given that no one else is doing this, to disclose my resources so that my opponents can assess what I might be able to do without my having access to their information.

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?

I would greatly appreciate having one giant questionnaire that I only had to fill out once, so that I'm not answering the same/similar question 20 times. It would be more useful to voters.

Immigration

- all
- 1. Do you support equal access to education and other County services for County residents regardless of immigration status?** Yes.
 - 2. Do you support the policy of not asking or checking immigration status unless there is a felony charge arrest?** Yes.
 - 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. I believe the benefits far outweigh the minimal costs. Learning English helps our residents participate more fully in work, education and family life.
 - 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.)** I voted to support making Takoma Park a sanctuary city in the midst of the wars in Central America. I do not support using local authorities or resources to identify people who are here in violation of immigration laws alone, but I do support doing so in the event of a felony arrest in which case county employees have to work with Federal authorities.

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 support what we've done and I support

legislation to limit use of sand mounds and 'tot' lots to children who are really intend to stay on the farm and hopefully continue the family farming tradition. I've supported legislation to increase the money available for and the circumstances under which the County can begin purchasing BLT's (Building Lot Termination rights) which are probably the biggest threat to the Ag reserve next to sand mounds.

Other

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

In my four years on the Council, I have worked tirelessly to listen to all the voices in our county and to develop policies that reflect a progressive vision. Wherever possible, I have worked to achieve consensus among groups that at first may seem quite different but who often have overlapping goals. But my history of working on progressive issues is far longer than my time on the Council. I've worked on school issues and was a teacher for 17 years. I've worked with communities throughout the county on redevelopment issues that impact their quality of life. I opposed the ICC and worked against it for years. I supported the creation of day laborer centers to give people a safe place to find work. I worked for the passage of living wage legislation. On the County Council, I sponsored legislation that extended labor protections to domestic workers, and cosponsored the county's prevailing wage law for county projects. I sponsored legislation that protected the view shed of the C&O Canal. I've supported and cosponsored Councilmember Roger Berliner's suite of environmental legislation. I've also cosponsored Councilmember Trachtenberg's legislation to provide fairness to transgender individuals and her legislation requiring so-called pregnancy clinics to disclose more of what they actually do. I continue working for safe and secure rental housing for the 25% of our residents who are tenants. I've done more than just work on someone else's political campaign, I've actually worked with people in communities on issues that affect their daily lives for almost 30 years.

The immediate priority will be to get the County back to a stable sustainable financial position. Only then will we have the wherewithal to address the many needs of the county.