

QUESTIONNAIRES FOR COUNTY COUNCIL CANDIDATES

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

At the Federal level I support progressive taxes, but at the local county, and at even the state level taxes should not be touched. There needs to be parity with neighboring regions to ensure that tax increases don't drive out people and businesses and result in loss of tax revenue. Millionaire's tax should be at the Federal level to avoid adverse regional effects. We should work with our Congressman to do that. I will support that effort.

I believe that process re-engineering through innovative use of technology and alignment of processes can save costs. Therefore cutting costs and reducing services should not be thought of as an acceptable assumption. If the system is not amenable to re-engineering analysis to reduce cost, or if there is no other perceived way, I will recommend that everyone earning more than \$50,000 annual income should take a pay cut and those making more than \$100,000 to a much higher degree. Since people who work for the public sector should come with the attitude of service, I think this must not be unacceptable. Thus services should not be compromised at the expense of reducing cost.

Services for children (education), retirees and for the poor will need to be higher priority over others.

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.
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?
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?
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 read the pdf document referred here. However I don't consider myself fully educated in this area. I agree that landlords should have limits on ability to raise rents for long term tenants and there should be limits on ability to evict for unreasonable reasons, and I agree that landlords who benefit from transportation choices like the Purple line should not convert a public investment as a windfall gain for themselves. From the perspective of county control, we should not make unreasonable rules that are difficult to enforce. In this matter any proposal that is endorsed by the County Executive should be considered seriously for passage.

Transportation & Infrastructure

1. Do you support the expansion of public transit, including building the Purple Line, CCT, and Bus Rapid Transit?
2. What other ways would you expand the building and usage of public transportation in the County?
3. Do you support tax or other incentives to promote telework, vanpools, and carpools?

During these times of reduced tax revenues, it is not possible to consider immediate additional investments. However, I would support an Employer tax per employee based on distance of residence from work and number of days the person works at home. This would be a Congestion Tax, that would encourage employers to let more people work at home more often and persuade employees to live closer to work. Of course, such business taxes for all businesses put together for the county should not be too burdensome to the degree that employers seek to leave the county. There has to be appropriate offsets.

Education

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

There are different elements of the budget. Teachers and content are more important. Facilities and support services are a little LESS important – not unimportant! Different aspects of the education budget should be analyzed and those that directly impact high quality of education cannot be compromised.

New Development

1. Do you support the recent increases in school and transportation impact fees?
2. Do you support assessments of infrastructure, service, health, environmental, human, and small business impacts prior to approval of new developments?
3. What changes in the County Master Plan do you support to promote smart, sensible, environmentally sound, and managed growth?
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?

I will need to study these matters carefully before giving a firm opinion. In general additional fees and taxes should be evaluated relative to neighboring counties in the region, so as not to do anything that makes the county undesirable. Also when decisions are made that affect a specific group of people, adversely affected people should be compensated and those with windfall gains should be assessed fees.

Elections

1. If State enabling legislation is passed, would you support campaign finance reform in

- Montgomery County, including publicly funded campaigns for County races?
2. Do you support such State enabling legislation?
 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?
 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?

Yes, in principle, to all these questions. However, anything that costs tax payer money will need to be revisited for deeper consideration given the current economic situation.

Immigration

1. Do you support equal access to education and other County services for all County residents regardless of immigration status?
2. Do you support the policy of not asking or checking immigration status unless there is a felony charge arrest?
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?
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.)

In this matter, I believe that one should be guided by Federal law, given the current challenge that is underway in Arizona. Being out of norm does not help – adds to problems.

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?

Years ago the county paid money to certain landowners to buy their rights against development and retain it as Agricultural Reserve. It would have been waste of tax payer money if the restrictions are not kept. And at this time I don't think the county has money to buy any more rights to Agricultural Reserve.

Other

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

Your organization should perceive me as an educated progressive and pragmatic person would can deliver meaningful results. I have a Ph.D. in Economics and have the tools to analyze any issue from benefit and cost perspectives, including social elements that are more difficult to translate into dollar terms. Therefore, while my intent is progressive, I will not promote anything that will end up driving out the tax base. Therefore your organization should think of me as a pragmatist with the right motivations at heart, with potential to get more accomplished.