

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR COUNTY COUNCIL CANDIDATES

Responses of Valerie Ervin, Democratic Candidate, Council District 5

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? Yes**

How specifically would you do this without unduly adding to the burden of moderate and modest income County residents?

In today's economic climate, it is clear that we must work hard to make sure the taxes we levy on our residents and businesses are not regressive. That is why I supported reducing the energy tax rate. Forty percent of the residents in District 5 are renters. This tax is a pass through to apartment renters and results in some cases in higher rents. Making cuts to the Executive's budget is not the way to go. The Council recently passed a Fiscal Plan that will be a game changer. The county must move forward with our priorities clearly outlined and defined.

2. **Do you support, at the state level, imposition of a 'millionaire's tax,' requiring upper income residents to pay higher taxes? Yes**
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 don't believe that you begin the conversation with where cuts should be made. The conversation begins with agreeing on a set of priorities and sticking with them. The fiscal plan that the council voted on recently is a game changer because we have outlined a plan to get to a 10% reserve. If we stick to this plan the way that we fund the budget will change beginning with looking at how large the budget will be and how we back into that number. Employee compensation and benefits and MOE are the structural budget deficit issues that must be addressed first before the Council looks at cuts.

While the national economic crisis dramatically impacted the County's Fiscal Year 2011 Operating Budget, the County Council balanced this budget by prioritizing education, public safety, and services for our neediest residents.

Throughout the budget process, I focused on what was equitable for our residents and our employees. While no one likes the idea of taking furlough days, the Council implemented a progressive furlough schedule for workers, where our highest paid employees will take the largest number of furlough days and our lowest paid employees will take the smallest number of days without pay.

While this was a very challenging budget cycle and no one feels good about having to reduce services and eliminate jobs, I believe that difficult times force individuals to dig down deep to find the courage to move through them. I believe that we will emerge on the other side of these tough times with a vision for Montgomery County that will bring us to a stronger, more sustainable future.

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 must do our best to maintain our current affordable housing stock. Existing laws related to the MPDU program need to be strengthened to ensure that we keep our existing units. As the economy improves we must also continue to allocate significant funding to the Housing Initiative Fund and remove regulatory barriers that make building affordable units unprofitable for builders.

- 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, Yes**

- 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 the March 2010 Tenants Work Group Report, and support the TWG's recommendations regarding Affordability and security, Code updates, enforcement and complaints, Landlord-tenant communication and tenant advocacy, and Particular needs of senior citizens and special needs populations.

- 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 agree with the Tenants Work Group Report that we must balance the interests of landlord choice and tenant need for predictability.

Transportation & Infrastructure

- 1. Do you support the expansion of public transit, including building the Purple Line, CCT, and Bus Rapid Transit? Yes**
- 2. What other ways would you expand the building and usage of public transportation in the County?**

When the Executive's FY11-16 CIP only included design funding for the Met Branch Trail, I felt a lack of progress and a lack of commitment to non-automotive modes of transportation. As a result, I asked for a review of the project and championed the request for federal funding. In the end the budget has been doubled for this project and the trails progress has been expedited because of my work.

I sponsored expedited bill 3-10 that makes it easier for sidewalks and bikeways to be built in communities that want and need them. This will help create critical pedestrian linkages to transit centers and bus stops. It also promotes safety and walkability for children to access safe routes to school.

I also sponsored a comprehensive Pedestrian Safety Initiative with the county executive. This \$5 million initiative has greatly expanded the county's pedestrian infrastructure and has made walking a safe and viable alternative to the automobile.

I am working with the county executive to bring a neighborhood bike rental program to Montgomery County. This program would allow residents to rent bikes for short periods of time for errands, recreation, and commuting. I am working with the executive's staff to secure a cost-neutral pilot program.

I supported the construction of a tunnel under Georgia Avenue to improve Metro access and pedestrian safety for the Forest Glen community. In December 2008, the Council approved \$2 million to design the tunnel.

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

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 Chair of the Education Committee and a former Montgomery County School Board member, I made sure that this budget continued to support the top-notch educational opportunities that our children receive at MCPS, while also protecting the critical services that our children rely on when they are not in the classroom. For example, many children and their families rely on Montgomery County for health care, housing assistance, and transportation.

Another tremendous asset for the County is Montgomery College. I am pleased that the Council restored a significant portion of the proposed budget reductions to allow the College to deal with its climbing enrollment numbers and to construct science labs and much needed classroom space.

I will continue the work that I began in my first four years on the Council. I have pushed Montgomery County to the front of the Universal Preschool movement. My advocacy has led to expanded community based preschool programs. I established the Universal Preschool Implementation Work Group and the Kennedy Cluster Project, which is focused on closing the achievement gap. As a result of my leadership the county increased the number of children receiving summer lunch by nearly 30%. I have also worked on the Council to eliminate obstacles and streamline the process for obtaining child care subsidies.

New Development

- 1. Do you support the recent increases in school and transportation impact fees?**
Yes
- 2. Do you support assessments of infrastructure, service, health, environmental, human, and small business impacts prior to approval of new developments?** Yes
- 3. What changes in the County Master Plan do you support to promote smart, sensible, environmentally sound, and managed growth?** I support putting the focus on transit oriented development in infill areas 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? These conversations are underway and are part of an ongoing community conversation along the Purple Line route. My primary focus is to maintain the current stock of affordable housing and to ensure that new development does not displace residents and that new construction has a mix of affordable units.

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**
- 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**

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**
 - 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.) Yes**

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? Yes.**

Other

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

My legislative agenda includes making changes that promote the interests of working families. I was the lead sponsor of the County's Prevailing Wage Law. This law requires contractors and subcontractors to pay prevailing wages to workers on county construction projects. I believe that government has a responsibility to ensure that working families are paid a fair wage to ensure self-sufficiency; otherwise, county government pays in the long run with higher costs for social services and housing assistance.

I have worked to dismantle barriers to high-quality child care by promoting better access to child care subsidies for families. I pushed county officials to eliminate obstacles and streamline the process for accessing child care subsidies. Without these subsidies, families must often choose substandard and unlicensed childcare for their children. Policymakers must create a system that encourages participation, so that families can easily access services. I proposed and the county funded the first ever project designed to close the Achievement Gap. It is called the Kennedy Cluster Project. It is designed to address barriers that children and families face outside the classroom that impacts a child's ability to excel. Also, I am very proud of the work that I accomplished on the Summer Food Program. This program provides lunch throughout the summer to children who qualify for free and reduced meals during the school year. The program has become so successful that it is now available for students at eight sites throughout the county. Through my leadership the County has increased the number of children receiving summer lunch by 30%.

I worked to ensure transparency and accountability by sponsoring and passing landmark whistleblower legislation. This legislation will allow and protect county employees from retaliation while reporting waste, fraud and abuse in the government. I also sponsored and passed legislation that would allow the Office of the Inspector General to hire outside counsel in cases where the Inspector General encounters road-blocks from within county government. I also fought to maintain the independence of the Ethics Commission and legislation is pending to make the Executive Director an attorney. This would strengthen the office and prevent undue influence from inside county government.

I asked the Office of Legislative Oversight to conduct a study on truancy in Montgomery County. The outgrowth of that study has produced a working relationship with the University of Baltimore, School of Law. My office has partnered with representatives from the law school and the State's Attorney's Office to create a pilot program at two middle schools that works to promote school attendance. So far the results of almost three months of work are very promising. We hope to be able to replicate this program in more schools next year.

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