

QUESTIONNAIRES FOR COUNTY COUNCIL CANDIDATES

Responses of George L. Leventhal, 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 supported the Montgomery County carbon tax which will require large polluters to pay for a fairer share of the environmental impacts they generate. This was an innovative revenue-raising proposal that will not increase burdens on working families. I have always sought to provide equity in tax policy with the greatest burdens falling on those with the greatest ability to pay.

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

This tax is already in place. I am not advocating its repeal.

- 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 budget the County Council passed in May was better, fairer and more humane than the budget the County Executive sent us in March. As Chairman of the Health and Human Services Committee, I took the lead in restoring funding to provide access to health care, services for the homeless and other programs affecting the county's neediest residents. We also added funding to prevent students from being turned away from Montgomery College. In the future, I will continue to do all I can to protect services for the poor, sick, elderly, homeless, disabled, mentally ill and abused and abandoned children.

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.**

I believe the council should re-evaluate the county's Housing Policy early in the next term. We should assemble reliable data that will tell us how many affordable housing units have been lost. We should assess the success of our Moderately Priced Dwelling Unit program and engage a broad range of stakeholders in a discussion about how best to ensure a wide variety of housing styles and prices for the county's future.

- 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 do think we need better data on rent increases. I am not able to take a position for or against countywide rent control until we have a better mechanism for measuring the extent of 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 it. I would support better data collection and more effective advocacy for tenants. As for rent control, I am not able to take a position for or against countywide rent control until we have a better mechanism for measuring the extent of rent increases.

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, although I would not limit just causes for eviction only to the two listed in this question.

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 of these projects mentioned. I am one of the founders of Purple Line Now! and have been among the most prominent Purple Line supporters in elected office. I won preliminary planning funding for Bus Rapid Transit on Veirs Mill Road and Georgia Avenue and I look forward to its implementation on Rockville Pike, on express lanes on the ICC and eventually on express lanes on I-270. Additional expansion in the future is also desirable.

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

The County Council prevented elimination of Ride-On bus routes in this budget. We must construct a new bus depot in order to expand service in the future because our current depot is too crowded to permit acquisition of additional buses.

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?

We have one of the nation's best school systems, although it is not by any means perfect. The school system needs to ensure productivity and results for the money we spend and must learn to live within the spending constraints embodied in the six-year fiscal plan recently adopted by the council.

New Development

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

I was not present for the vote on the last round of impact fee increases in 2007 because I was recovering from a catastrophic automobile accident. I think the fees adopted by the council are high (by far the highest in Maryland and among the highest in the United States) although I do not advocate reducing them at this time.

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

The Planning Board approval process requires review of the impact of every new development.

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

In general, I have been happy with the smart growth vision being promoted by the Planning Board. I enthusiastically supported the recently-adopted White Flint and Great Seneca Science Corridor master plans, which set the stage for significantly expanding jobs and housing opportunities at transit hubs. Additional targeted opportunity areas of the county where we need to concentrate and expand economic activity include Germantown, Rock Spring, Bethesda, Silver Spring, White Oak/Calverton, Wheaton and Glenmont. I will be working with businesses and residents in each of these areas during a third term. I am generally pleased so far with the effort to rewrite the zoning code to promote mixed-use cosmopolitan environments in these targeted opportunity areas.

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 Council will address this issue when we take up the Takoma/Langley and Long Branch Sector Plans in the coming year.

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?**

My campaign will continue to comply with applicable state law, including any changes that may be enacted in the future. It would not be fair to my hard-working volunteer treasurer to expect her to comply with rules that are different than the already very complex state rules.

- 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

- 1. Do you support equal access to education and other County services for all 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.)**

I don't think further legislation is necessary in this area. County employees do not refer people to ICE except in the case of violent criminal offenders.

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 believe that our Agricultural Reserve must be protected from development forever. When I served as Council President in 2006, I was responsible for the appointment of the Ad Hoc Agricultural Policy Working Group which recommended measures to strengthen protection from development for agricultural land including the Building Lot Termination program.

Other

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

The highlights of my service on the County Council have been:

- *Establishment of a countywide network of health care clinics providing medical care for the poor and uninsured;*
- *Adoption of the “Housing First” approach to placing formerly homeless persons in permanent stable housing;*
- *Enactment of one of the nation’s strongest green buildings laws;*
- *Adoption of a County Energy Policy that now sets aside 30% of all county electricity purchases from clean, renewable wind power;*
- *Co-founding Purple Line Now!*
- *Co-founding Bethesda Green, a private-public partnership that encourages sustainable lifestyles and is Maryland’s first green jobs incubator;*
- *Sponsoring the Domestic Workers Contract Act, making Montgomery County the first jurisdiction in the nation to require employment contracts for domestic employees;*

These and other accomplishments demonstrate my firm philosophical commitment to meeting people’s needs and moving our community in a more environmentally sustainable direction. Because of my strong progressive record on the council, I have already been endorsed for re-election in 2010 by many other progressive organizations including: Progressive Maryland; National Organization for Women (Montgomery County chapter); Montgomery County Education Association; NARAL Pro-Choice Maryland; Metropolitan Washington Council, AFL-CIO; and Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Local 500.