

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR COUNTY COUNCIL CANDIDATES

Responses of Hans Riemer, At-Large Democratic Candidate

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?

I have three concerns when I consider our tax structure:

1) Taxes must only be high enough to generate revenue to pay for the vital services the county provides, and no higher. Surpluses should be saved for rainy days and also returned to the taxpayers. During the boom times of our recent past, however, the County Council raised taxes, and now there are few alternatives for raising revenue.

2) The tax structure should be fundamentally progressive and it should be broad-based rather than singling out particular groups of people for unfair burdens. It cannot place an unrealistic burden on the poor, elderly or otherwise disadvantaged. In the property tax context, the state of Maryland has a Homeowner Tax Relief program designed to protect lower income families and the elderly and disabled from losing their property because the assessments and tax rates on their property has gone up and they can no longer afford them, and Montgomery County has taken steps to expand this program, both in terms of eligibility and the extent of relief (see:

http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/content/finance/CountyTaxes/Tax_Break.pdf). We must ensure that these programs and the income limits governing eligibility (currently \$64,000) keep pace with inflation and any changes in the property tax rates.

3) Our tax burden must be competitive relative to other jurisdictions in our region. We do not need to have the lowest taxes, and we have a higher quality of life in Montgomery County because we are willing to pay for it. But we do have to be vigilant to ensure that the tax burden in this county does not grow so high compared to Northern Virginia or DC that we cannot compete for jobs. A 2009 DC government survey estimated the average total tax burden on a family of three making \$100,000 a year would be \$10,104 in Montgomery County, compared to \$7,938 in DC, \$8,276 in Alexandria, \$8,417 in Arlington County and \$8,347 in Fairfax County (see:

http://cfo.dc.gov/cfo/frames.asp?doc=/cfo/lib/cfo/ora/093009_2008_tax_rates_and_burdens.pdf).

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

I support reform at the state level to promote a more progressive tax structure. The millionaire's tax has proven to be less successful in raising money because there are far fewer millionaires today than there were when it was passed, according to recent research. Progressive tax reform could mean maintaining the millionaire's tax or another proposal that would achieve a similar objective of broad based progressive taxation -- including corporate tax reform -- remains to be seen, but it is needed.

3f 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?

On the Council, I will work to stabilize our long-term fiscal position in a way that protects our key priorities, particularly education. My goal is to meet the challenge of restructuring our government for a new era of reduced tax revenues, while working diligently to expand our tax base for the long term. The next Council will need to partner with the County Executive and the separate agencies to focus the mission and priorities of each agency for a new fiscal era, and review work procedures to

identify inefficiencies. We need a unified process with stakeholders and Council members that goes beyond the usual committee procedures. The conversation will become a search to define the core services. Because most ideas and services are good ideas, we must distinguish the good from the essential, and we must determine that each dollar we spend is affordable, sustainable, and can only be done by the county government. For example, if the Department of Recreation were to prioritize serving youth and seniors, how would that change resource allocation? Since health care reform has been passed at the national level, how will that affect our county services? And what about middle-managers? With county spending increasing dramatically in recent years, there is no doubt in my mind that we have management positions that we can do without. Diving this deep on our budgets, however, will require a crisis-turnaround mentality and agreement from partners about the nature and scope of the problem.

This mission needs to be supported by a new budget process. Many jurisdictions around the country have moved to a system where agencies start from scratch every year with their budgets, rather than assuming the previous year's budget amounts (zero-based budgeting). This system forces managers to be more strategic and more efficient, because there is no incentive for duplication; but it allows them more flexibility to meet the mission. This budget approach also demands much stronger leadership from the agency heads and a real partnership with labor. Legislation should be authorized to let several county agencies test a zero-based budget next year.

2 . 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.

Demand for housing in Montgomery vastly outstrips the supply of housing. As a result, the price of rent and housing is high for people at every income level, and for countless workers it is prohibitively expensive. Montgomery County is many tens of thousands of units short of the current demand for housing, let alone projected demand over the next few decades, which induces people to drive to work in the county from long distances. While inclusionary zoning for low-income and workforce residents can help secure some units, for set-aside policies to succeed there has to be a high volume of new housing created in the first place. That is not the case today, and we need to look at the development process and its costs in order to understand why, as well as take strong steps in our sector plans to support new housing in the right places in Montgomery County. Those places are within walking distance of mass transit, whether Metro, light-rail, or rapid bus. For a company considering whether to locate in Montgomery County, the inadequate supply of housing for its workforce would be a deal breaker. This illustrates a long term challenge for the county, which is that the supply of housing determines the strength of our economy, since companies will not locate or expand here if it is too expensive for their workers. This in turn determines our tax base, which is where we find the resources to meet our challenge of supporting our world-class quality of life. We need more housing, jobs, workforce training, and other key economic development initiatives in order to support our quality of life and key services such as education and health care.

Montgomery County must take strong steps now to increase our housing supply and promote affordability. While we should not continue policies that promote conversion of green space/farms into cul-de-sac communities, we must support multi-family housing on transit. Transit oriented development promotes environmentally sustainable economic growth. When commercial and retail uses are combined with housing, and matched with amenities such as parks, child care, and community spaces, these growth areas create highly desirable places to live. When walking, biking and transit are viewed as the primary means for transportation in those areas and provided with an appropriately high priority, people will not need to drive everywhere they go and will reduce the carbon that they emit into our atmosphere. The recent plan for the White Flint area is a superb example of effective transit-oriented design, and the large volume of new housing there will help the workforce, from younger teachers to retirees, with more affordable rental and ownership options.

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 support the Tenants Work Group Report recommendation of a mandatory survey process that will provide the county and residents with the information necessary to make more informed policies. I do not believe that rent stabilization is necessary based on information I have seen about typical yearly rent increases in the county, but I will collaborate with residents and community organizations such as the new Montgomery County Renter's Alliance to improve the situation for tenants in the county.

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 fully support the process and dialogue initiated by this Work Group. I think the next step in the policy making process needs to be accumulation of evidence about problems we are trying to address. In order to vote on some of the recommendations from the report, policy makers would need a substantial body of research to inform their decisions. Clearly, another important step in this process requires sitting down with property owners to negotiate solutions.

The Tenants Work Group made a number of recommendations that sound reasonable. Among others, mandatory reporting of rent increases to allow the County to develop a body of information that will enable informed policy-making. A number of recommendations deal with improved communication between landlords and tenants, or between landlords, tenants and the County. I support these efforts such as using the 311 information system to disseminate information to tenants and property owners. A Landlord-Tenant handbook and a streamlined process for landlords and tenants to access help from the County would also help as would clear language governing the use of deposits. Tenants have the right to organize and should feel free to do so; therefore I support prohibiting retaliatory evictions for joining tenant associations.

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, though a body of evidence is needed for the county to establish need in order to properly weigh costs and benefits; and the specified reasons for what counts as just cause would need careful deliberation and negotiation with all stakeholders. Similar laws have been enacted in other jurisdictions and I would want to learn more about the impact of those laws.

3 . Transportation & Infrastructure

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

My vision for Montgomery County is a network of tightly-knit, walkable, mixed use communities interconnected by high quality transportation alternatives, including better transit, walking, and biking options. I strongly support the Purple Line, building the CCT and creating Rapid Bus Transit across the County.

We need a council that will fight tenaciously for the Purple Line to get it through the state and federal funding processes. With strong regional and national competition for transit dollars, we cannot afford to be complacent. Montgomery County can do more to ensure its transportation priorities receive funding, but that will require county officials who will make the effort to reach out to our state and federal representatives

to ensure we speak with one loud voice for local transit. I will work every day to make this happen until it is done.

The Corridor Cities Transitway was first proposed in the early 1970s---more than 35 years ago! How long

do we really plan to wait? It is time for the County to take responsibility for getting the CCT built. That will mean looking at financing mechanisms that don't require waiting for a Federal approval process that could come

in decades, if it ever comes at all. And once we control the process, we should look at extending the line into downtown Rockville and the town of Clarksburg. Buses are not a peripheral service, they are a core priority, and they should have higher priority within our transportation network. Though I am concerned that the existing bus system is targeted for cuts, I am excited to see the growing interest in rapid routes. As a strong transit advocate, I will help move this vision forward. Metro was our first generation transit system---we need a new generation system, which will be a light rail Purple Line, the CCT, RideOn buses, and rapid bus routes, working together to provide real alternatives to driving for all our residents.

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

In this economic climate every part of county government faces tight budget constraints. We will have to give priority to proposals that can be paid for with federal or state funds or will produce positive economic returns in the near to medium term. In my view, mass transit projects are the best way to get cars off the road and build a foundation we can build on sustainably in the future. They also create green jobs, encourage investment and economic activity, and reduce our carbon footprint. Through my involvement in the Action Committee for Transit, I have been fighting for public transportation solutions and I continue to believe that the Purple Line and other public transportation projects are the solution to many of our county's problems. Another priority should be retrofitting and upgrading county vehicle fleets and facilities,

especially where these processes can be integrated into ongoing construction and repairs.

Our first priority must be to restore Metro's position as a superior transit system. It is the backbone of our economy in Montgomery County, and if it deteriorates, so will our quality of life. We need our Council and the County Executive to fight hard for dedicated capital funding from the state transportation budget, including fighting for new ways to fund that transportation budget. Once stabilized, Metro will need to expand capacity in the coming decades.

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

Yes, I support incentives that together with smart planning will reduce the amount of trips made in cars. We need to get more residents out of their cars, more often -- and we need to ensure new residents have ample alternatives to driving for all of their basic needs.

Education

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

MCPS is moving aggressively to meet the challenges posed by the huge growth of the school system and the changing demographics of our students. Low-income and disadvantaged families are increasingly moving into Montgomery County and their children are enrolling in the school system. MCPS sets high expectations and refuses to accept anything less than excellence as a goal for all students. MCPS also provides superior educational options to high achieving students. These commitments must be sustained, even in an era of fiscal austerity. One area that is working well in MCPS is a focus on excellence in teaching through support and accountability. Educational data shows that the most important factor in student achievement is teacher quality---it is more determinative than the social conditions in the family or the overall conditions at the school or in the school system. MCPS has a track record of working to improve teacher quality, particularly through its partnership with MCEA on the PAR program.

A concern that I hear regularly is that "the kids in the middle" do not get as much attention, because MCPS is focused on raising achievement for students at the bottom and is already good at providing opportunity for high achievers. This concern presents a real dilemma and I would like to see a concerted effort by MCPS to respond to the issue. An additional change I would like to see is greater collaboration

between the County Council, Board of Education, County Executive, and our state legislative delegation, to ensure that we speak with one voice to fund MCPS priorities.

4 . 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?

These issues should always be considered, with some receiving a very high level of scrutiny. The next Council needs to figure out how to improve the efficiency of the development review process to sustain citizen input and consider these issues while shortening the waste of time and money that is involved in the current process.

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

An important objective for planning for new housing and commercial space is a high non-auto mode share. Forty percent should be the minimum mode share achieved by any significant expansion of commercial space and housing. In some areas, particularly Downcounty and around Metro stations, we can achieve fifty percent. Goals such as these should be front and center in any discussion about new development. Transforming our county requires aggressive transit planning and investment as well as a shift towards walkable, bikable communities. That is the only way to reduce our carbon emissions, preserve our greenspace, create green infrastructure jobs, and still allow our local economy to grow. I strongly support land use and transportation planning that reduces energy consumption while protecting and improving the

quality of life in our communities. The Montgomery County General Plan, while establishing the agricultural reserve, nevertheless fails to be create a truly sustainable vision because it puts most of the jobs on one side of the county and most housing on the other, while relying on highways to move people east-west between them. I do believe we need to correct this imbalance by bringing more jobs to Eastern Montgomery County, which requires a significant expansion of commercial space. This should be undertaken, however, with ambitious goals for non-auto mode share.

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 county can exercise its right of first refusal to purchase properties if they come up for sale along the route, as well as create incentives with non-profit housing developers to protect the existing affordable housing stock. It is possible to improve services without displacing residents if we are committed to the goal.

5 . 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?

Months ago I considered doing it and concluded that I cannot do it unilaterally in this campaign, but I may in future campaigns if there is no law and I would support a requirement for everyone to disclose on that schedule now and in the future.

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

6. Immigration

1. Do you support equal access to education and other County services for all County residents regardless of immigration status? **The problem of immigrants entering this country without documentation to seek better opportunities will not be solved by denying education and public services once they have arrived. Maintaining equal access to education and other vital County services will ensure that basic human rights are met for all residents of the County.**

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

2. 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**

3. 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 support our current approach and I do not support Arizona-type laws or otherwise trying to block residents from county services. I believe the immigration challenge must be solved through national immigration reform, which I strongly support.

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 protecting the Agriculture Reserve. The Agricultural Reserve is a great economic asset, as a recent Washington Post article pointed out. Montgomery County is the only county in the region which still has the ability to produce a substantial amount of agricultural output, and growing demand for locally-grown food (which is more healthy for our families and our environment) makes protecting the Ag Reserve more important than ever. According to the article, "[a]griculture contributes more than \$243 million annually to the county economy, and local farms employ more than 10,000 residents."

Other

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

I have a long and successful track record of organizing for progressive social change. I have lead victorious fights to protect working families and seniors from Social Security cuts. I have organized new voters and young people for progressive change. I have fought here in the County against cuts to transit services such as Metro and RideOn, and to build new services such as the Purple Line. I am a strong progressive candidate for council as we look to meet our budget, economic, environmental and other challenges and I ask for your support.