

Hans Riemer Response

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR COUNTY COUNCIL CANDIDATES 2014 Elections

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Budget & Tax

1. What is your vision of taxation and spending in Montgomery County? Some revenue sources include property tax, bag tax or a potential business tax similar to what Fairfax County imposes. How do you think we should raise money?

More than 85% of the county's local tax revenue comes from the income tax and the property tax. The income tax is at the state maximum (3.2%). The property tax is subject to the Ficker Amendment, which is probably the worst policy ever approved by Montgomery County voters. These two limitations in concert impede the county's ability to raise more revenues in a static environment.

That said, there are options for improvement. First, I have supported a high income tax offset credit (currently \$692 per principal residence) to make our property tax more progressive. I led the effort to defeat a [2011 proposal](#) by Council Member Phil Andrews to cut the offset credit for the purpose of cutting the property tax rate, which would have disproportionately benefited the wealthy. Second, I have introduced a [bill](#) to expand a property tax credit for low-income seniors to help them stay in their homes. Third, I support legislation at the state level that would help us create flexible tax districts to pay for infrastructure outside the charter limit. Fourth, I passed legislation to make our tax system more progressive by increasing our Earned Income Tax Credit. I will continue to look for options to expand progressivity in our tax code while ensuring that we collect adequate revenues.

Most importantly, we must have a dynamic economy to expand our tax base in the future. Robust economic growth is key to maintaining county services as well as our quality of life in the long term. As I often tell residents, if you want new school buildings, you need new office buildings to pay for them.

2. In good times what are your spending priorities? How would they differ in hard times? If you ranked human safety net services, education, transportation and libraries for county spending, how would you rank them and why?

The budget process is all about balancing needs, almost all of which are legitimate. In the past, I have focused on restoring funding for libraries, increasing funding for the county's Earned Income Tax Credit, providing money for health care services for the uninsured, and adding more money for Working Parents Assistance (to help pay for child care), among other priorities. This year, I am supporting a record increase in local money for school construction. I am still reviewing the Executive's proposed budget and assessing where I would like to make changes in the council's final budget. Education must continue to be the highest priority, and I think we should fund as much as we can of the BOE's budget request for MCPS.

3. How would you ensure that taxes/fees do not unduly impact those with lower incomes?

I led the effort to defeat a [2011 proposal](#) by Council Member Phil Andrews to cut the offset credit for the purpose of cutting the property tax rate, which would have disproportionately benefited the

wealthy. I wrote and passed a bill to restore the county's Earned Income Tax Credit, which was cut during the recession. I have also introduced a bill to expand the county's property tax credit for low-income seniors.

4. Do you have any innovative approaches to income and wealth disparities? Please share them.

Income inequality is a serious issue and I have a record of addressing it during my term in office.

I voted for a county minimum wage of \$11.50 an hour. In addition, I worked to strip exemptions from the bill including those applying to the county as an employer, to day laborers, tipped workers and to workers under the age of 19. Regrettably, I was the only Council Member to vote against the youth exemption and the tipped worker exemption.

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I have introduced a [bill](#) to expand a property tax credit for low-income seniors to help them stay in their homes.

One issue that I worked particularly hard on is the county's Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC). By raising the after-tax income of low wage workers, the EITC rewards work and lifts people out of poverty. It is one of the nation's most effective anti-poverty programs. It is also proven to improve educational outcomes for children. After the prior council cut our EITC by a third during the recession, I introduced and passed a bill to restore it.

Affordable Housing

While renters in Montgomery County account for 25-30% of households, the affordable rental housing supply continues to shrink. In 2009 the Tenant Work Group, convened by Ike Leggett, expressed the following concerns:

- Unaffordable rent increases
- Fear of retaliation for voicing concerns about the property
- Unreasonable month-to-month surcharges
- Crime and safety

5. What can you and the County Council do to support the County's 250,000 renters?

The key to helping renters is to increase the county's stock of affordable housing. I have been a consistent advocate for affordable housing, helping to achieve victories such as:

- Increasing set-asides in new development. The council enacted an important change in the zoning code rewrite, incentivizing developers to build 15% of their units as MPDU affordable set asides rather than 12.5%.
- Supporting accessory dwellings. The council took action to make it significantly easier for a homeowner to create an accessory dwelling, which is a rental unit added to a house, with its own kitchen and bathroom.

- Allowing more housing near public transportation. A steady supply of new housing is an important ingredient for the overall affordability of the housing supply.
- Boosting the Housing Initiative Fund. We have increased funding substantially for acquisition and redevelopment of affordable housing.

I am proud of my work to increase the housing supply, increase incentives for affordable housing, and boost the county's own direct provision of affordable housing, but we have a lot more to do.

Transportation & Infrastructure

6. How do you propose funding the Purple Line and the Corridor Cities Transitway (CCT) RTS/BRT has been accepted as a way to decrease gridlock in the future; how will you work to assure that funding is available and that communities are part of this solution?

Transportation infrastructure is a huge priority for the county. It is also a big issue for the state since our largest projects (the Purple Line, the CCT and funding for WMATA) are under state funding and control. For years, the state starved its transportation budget with repeated raids and under-funding. The situation became so serious last year that it looked as if the state would not be able to afford a matching contribution to proposed federal aid for the Purple Line. I worked with transit activists, the business community, smart growth institutions and environmentalists to found Get Maryland Moving, a grass-roots coalition to press the General Assembly to fund transportation. The state did the right thing and raised revenue for transportation. Hopefully, our transportation priorities are back on track.

At the county level, I have been active in supporting funding for the Bethesda South Metro Entrance (which connects to the Purple Line), the Capital Crescent Trail, studies for bus rapid transit lines and increases for bicycle and pedestrian improvements. Improved infrastructure is a necessary complement to, and facilitator of, economic growth.

7. What can the Council do to promote telework, vanpools, and carpools?

I agree that as we look to the future, we must focus more on demand management and other steps to more efficiently use our existing infrastructure. I am a co-sponsor of Bill 12-14, which calls on the Executive Branch to develop a regulation to promote teleworking.

Education

8. School construction has fallen behind in projected Capital Budgets. How will you work with the Montgomery County Delegation in Annapolis to insure adequate capital budgets for MCPS?

I have worked with the Executive and other members of the County Council to make sure the delegation understands our need for fair funding from the state. While the county has steadily increased its local spending on school construction over the years, the state has decreased its spending on school construction here in Montgomery County. The state once provided nearly half of our school construction budget, but today they provide about 15%. I have worked with our delegation in Annapolis to support their efforts to press this point.

9. Since approximately half of the students in the County do not go to college what should the county be doing in economic development to ensure that these graduates find jobs?

I am working with building trades unions on new legislation to promote apprenticeship training on county construction projects. We must also continue to improve Montgomery College, which is our county's best workforce accelerator. For young people who may not attend a four year college, they may still get a specialized certificate through Montgomery College and advance their career goals.

New Development and the Environment

10. It is obvious that our infrastructure needs are not being met as the county continues to grow. How should and can the County Council review and impact proposals for development that will create significant infrastructure issues such as:

Traffic and transportation

Water and sewer

Power, gas, phone and cable

Preservation of the environment

Health

Small business

Our master plans must contain plans for enough infrastructure to meet the needs of new development. In other words, they must be balanced and, in some cases, staged to new infrastructure (as was Chevy Chase Lake). The council sent the draft White Oak Science Gateway Master Plan back to the Planning Board twice because it was not balanced. Our county grows continually because we are a highly desirable place to live in a region that is one of the country's economic powerhouses. That is not going to change and we are always going to struggle to keep pace with infrastructure. One of the more important changes we can make is to change our pattern of development so that we are putting new housing where there is existing infrastructure, such as in existing urbanized areas. I am one of the council's strongest champions for this smart-growth type of development plan.

11. What changes in the County Master Plans are required to ensure that smart, sensible, environmentally sound growth is a continued priority? How will you support development that does not take down trees and disturb watersheds?

We need to concentrate new development near transit. I voted for transit-centric master plans like Chevy Chase Lake, Long Branch, Glenmont, Wheaton and Takoma-Langley. I voted to dramatically cut back new development proposed for Ten Mile Creek. I have put these values into action.

12. How would you ensure that the Agricultural Reserve continues to be viable as an economic center and environmentally protected area?

The Agricultural Reserve must be preserved for future generations. That means limiting non-agricultural development within its borders as well as encouraging sustainable and economically viable agricultural activities, including educational activities that open new opportunities for our county residents to participate in what our farm-land has to offer.

Immigration

13. What can the County Council do to support our immigrant community? 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? What other approaches do you favor?

Immigrants do better when they are supported by holistic and integrated services, and their children do better academically. That is why I have championed public transportation and secured increases in county spending for health care clinics for the uninsured. I have supported increases to Child Welfare Services, Early Childhood Services and Child Care Subsidies. To help families, I wrote a bill to restore the county's EITC, which was cut during the recession, and worked with Casa to pass it. I supported raising the minimum wage and worked closely with Casa to achieve that goal, including making sure that day laborers were not exempted. I have supported making our taxation more progressive. In the school setting, I support more ESOL teaching positions and wrap around services such as Linkages to Learning. And I have supported funding for Montgomery College, which provides educational opportunities for so many new immigrant youth. I have strongly opposed "secure communities" mandates that would undermine our local law enforcement strategy by making our police an arm of immigration enforcement.

Elections and Transparency

14. Maryland is making many improvements in transparency at the state level regarding hearings and legislation. Given the fact that currently many hearings and council meetings are televised, how would you improve this process in the county?

I wrote and passed the Open Data Act of 2012, which put in place a process by which county departments would post publicly-available datasets on the county's [website](#). The law also requires the county to post Public Information Act requests and responses for all to see, which I believe will be a first for any local or state government in the country.

On televising meetings, when I arrived at the council, only one-quarter of council committee sessions were videotaped. I pushed hard to get the money to record and post all of them as video-on-demand. That is now our standard procedure.

15. Should elections be financed with public funds? Should limitations be placed on private funds, money from development interests and PACs?

Explain why you support a particular option. How can the voters be assured that elected officials keep the public interest as a priority?

Yes, public funds should be available to candidates who are willing to set limits on campaign raising and expenditures. I am a co-sponsor of Bill 16-14, which provides for a public campaign financing system for our elections. This system would be an alternative to the traditional system provided for in state law, and would allow candidates to raise money in small donations with a government match. In exchange, the new system would prohibit PAC and corporate contributions.

Experience

16. Please describe your professional experiences that will allow you to be an effective member of the County Council. What organizations have you worked with and why will that help you to serve the public?

My background in public policy and campaign organizing prepared me well for the job of County Councilmember. I was a senior advisor for AARP before joining the County Council. A nationally recognized leader on Social Security, I played a pivotal role organizing the Democratic coalition that stopped President Bush and the Republicans from privatizing Social Security. Tom Matzzie, of MoveOn.org, called me "one of five people in the country most responsible for protecting Social

Security from George Bush.”

I am well known for my work as National Youth Vote Director for Obama for America, where I was a key early staffer on President Obama’s 2007 primary election campaign. Starting with the landslide turnout of young voters in the Iowa Caucus and continuing through the Maryland primary, I helped young voters raise their voices for change. I was also instrumental in forming the Montgomery County and Maryland for Obama operations, bringing the new politics of the Obama campaign home to my community, where it thrives today as Organizing for Action.

In the 2004 election, I served as political director for Rock the Vote, as the group registered nearly a million young voters and broke new ground in online political engagement. I organized a Democratic presidential candidates debate with CNN, an advocacy campaign promoting the young adult health insurance option (which I later brought to the Obama campaign), and guided the organization’s strategy, including the controversial media campaign on the military draft that rocked the 2004 presidential election.

In 1996, as a recent college graduate, I founded a non-profit organization called the 2030 Center, which brought young people and all generations together to protect Social Security, boost health care, and support progressive solutions for fiscal challenges at the federal level.

In Montgomery County, as a past board member and president of the Action Committee for Transit, I helped a strong grassroots citizen group work to prioritize funding for public transportation.

17. Progressive Neighbors is committed to supporting progressive candidates and issues.

- Why do you think that this organization should support your candidacy?
- Give an example of a progressive issue that you have supported in the past 5 years.

My record on the council is a progressive one by any definition. I wrote and passed a bill on open government. I voted in favor of a minimum wage hike and provided the key for to create new protections for displaced building service workers (janitors). I voted in favor of numerous master plans that provided for new affordable housing near transit. I fought for funding for the Purple Line and the Corridor Cities Transitway. I voted to increase funding for libraries, child care subsidies and many health and human services programs. I voted for two bills to protect tree canopy and I played a leadership role developing a plan to cut back new development proposed for the Ten Mile Creek watershed. Perhaps the progressive issue I have worked hardest on is the Earned Income Tax Credit.

Montgomery County is one of the few local jurisdictions in the U.S. that has an EITC. Established in 2000, the county’s EITC was set to match the state’s EITC dollar-for-dollar. In 2010, the council changed the law to allow the county EITC to vary with budget decisions. The council promptly cut the EITC by a third *in the middle of a recession*.

When I came to the council, I was determined to restore the EITC. In 2012, I worked with my colleagues to win funding to push it up to a level of 75% of the state EITC. But that was not enough. In 2013, urged by Council Member Ervin, the council jointly undertook a “SNAP challenge” during which each member

would live on five dollars a day for five days. This event enhanced awareness of poverty, which is a significant problem in our county. In its aftermath, I introduced [Bill 8-13](#), which fully restored the county's EITC in law. I had two (later three) co-sponsors for the bill. It attracted [significant opposition](#) from other members of the council. Some told me to give up. They said the bill could not pass.

Instead, I organized a large coalition including Progressive Neighbors, the Community Action Board, Progressive Maryland, MCGEO, Casa, non-profits and faith-based groups to support it. Of their own volition, they ran a petition drive, canvassed neighborhoods, wrote an [op-ed](#) and aggressively lobbied the council. After many months of work, the bill passed 9-0.

I am proud to have worked in partnership with these great organizations to help working people with the EITC. If I am reelected, I hope to work on more progressive proposals like this one.