

## County Council Candidate Questionnaire

### Vision for Economic Development

1. *Please share your vision for fostering an economic environment that leads to job creation and private investment.*

At present, I am a marketing professor at the Robert H. Smith School of Business. I understand just how difficult it is to launch and run a successful business, especially for first-time entrepreneurs. Therefore, my thinking tends to be slightly left of center. I am keen on expanding opportunity for those who have been traditionally pushed to the margins. Yet, at the same time, I want to free business of any unnecessary encumbrances such as excessive taxes and heavy-handed regulations. We all do better when everyone is gainful employed and business owners are able to pursue their economic interests.

2. *What do you envision being your most significant accomplishment during your four-year term to enhance Howard County's business environment?*

According to the most recent U.S. Census data, Howard County is now a minority-majority where representation reads as follows: White American 49.8%, African American 19.5%, Asian American 18.5%, Hispanic American 7.3%, Two or more races 4%, and remaining groups filing out the balance.

We are the wealthiest jurisdiction in Maryland. In 2019, our median household income (\$121,618) was almost double that of the rest of the country (\$65,712). Why? Because we're a thriving epicenter for talented knowledge workers.

The top five largest employers of our district consist of Howard County Public School System (8,230 workers), Johns Hopkins Applied Physics Lab (7,000 workers), Howard County Government (3,200 workers), Howard County General Hospital (1,765 workers), and Verizon (1,700 workers).

So, the question stands, what does the racial makeup of these companies look like? Do they reflect the current BIPOC representation of Howard County? As one teases apart the layers of these organizations, do we see African Americans at all levels of the organization consistent with their countywide representation? Can the same be said for Asians? Or Latinos?

To be frank, the answer is no which means we have a lot to do. In terms of employment, equal access and opportunity must be granted talent BIPOC individuals. The strictures and legacy impediments which forestall equality in employment must be dealt with. It's the only way forward.

If elected to Howard County Council, I will do my utmost to drafts laws, regulations, and ordinances to ensure accountability from employers regarding building a 21<sup>st</sup> Century diverse workforce.

- 3. What challenges do you anticipate coming up in the long term that require a different approach than today?*

For the long term, education tops my list of priorities for Howard County. We can only reap the benefits of a knowledge-based economy if we have a highly educated workforce. I have seen firsthand how my family was able to move from working class to the upper echelons of society through access to higher education. My start at Princeton, in large part, would not be possible if I didn't have a solid grounding in AP Calculus, AP Chemistry, AP Biology and AP English in high school.

As a business professor, I know that the craft of teaching doesn't come easy. Many of my colleagues have bestowed upon me the label of being a master teacher. Yet, the truth of the matter is that the profession of teaching is a never-ending journey to hone one's prowess in the classroom. With that said, what keeps me going is the sheer joy of exciting learning in others. I can do so because I am free of encumbrances such as administrative overreach. Having the autonomy to present in a fashion that I deem appropriate has fueled my passion for teaching. Therefore, I would argue that the most pressing issue facing the profession is to allow K-12 educators their rightful autonomy to teach as they see fit. Time and time again, we have come to the same conclusion - excellence in teaching is not based upon set curricula, fancy PowerPoint presentations, or the latest and greatest technology. Instead, the magic lies within the caliber and commitment of the teacher.

## **Budgeting & Fiscal Prudence**

- 4. The FY 2023 Spending Affordability Report stated that Howard County showed improved revenues during the Covid 19 pandemic. However, this performance was not sustainable due to temporary factors such as an extraordinary contribution of federal stimulus funding and strong performances by the stock and real estate markets. The report added that "such above-historical-average growth during a time of unprecedented financial uncertainty,*

*overwhelming health and safety challenges, and massive job loss is counter-intuitive and not a reflection of sustainable economic fundamentals, especially as local employment remains well below the pre-pandemic level.” Considering this statement, what do you see as the biggest challenge for the County budget and how do you to plan to address these fiscal constraints?*

Thankfully, under Calvin Ball’s leadership, Howard County recently instituted RISE Business Assistance Grants to lessen the financial burdens faced by small businesses. The funding of this initiative hovers around \$20 million. While this is certainly a step in the right direction, more monies must be allocated to recharge our beleaguered business sector.

In addition, I would propose offering free, county-sponsored consultation to small businesses seeking federal sustenance. For example, the Biden Administration currently offers meaningful assistance to small businesses through the Paycheck Protection Program, Economic Injury Disaster Loans, SBA Debt Relief, and Shuttered Venue Operators Grants. Often, small business owners could use a guiding hand to wade through the byzantine paperwork process.

## **Development & Regulatory Environment**

5. *Economic development and investment are predicated on regulatory predictability whereby the rules of engagement are set and understood by all seeking to do business in a jurisdiction. Howard County has historically been praised for its predictable business environment. Private sector public opinion has waned recently due to the enactment of legislation that differs from the State and surrounding counties. Do you feel these sentiments are warranted, how and why?*

Yes, I feel these sentiments are justified from standpoint of local businesses. It is well known that relative to other counties in Maryland, Howard has had a more genteel pace in terms of growth. Given its history as a farming county, huge tracts of land tended to stay in family hands for long periods of time. Only gradually has this coveted land been converted for commercial or residential use (e.g., Maple Lawn).

This pervasive sense of unpredictability stems from smart growth initiatives. For example, there is a movement afoot keen on preserving greenspaces wherever possible. This requirement meant to reduce our collective carbon footprint has resulted in delayed construction and added business costs.

6. *In 2018, the County Council passed an Adequate Public Facilities Ordinance that many believed would stall and slow future development. Department of Planning & Zoning data does in fact reflect a slowdown in development permits being submitted.*
  - a. *Based upon the fiscal pressures facing the county, do you think this legislation should be revisited during the next council term?*
  - b. *If so, what would be the objectives of any revisions you would pursue? If not, why not?*
  - c. *Considering this legislation, how will you promote economic development and still address the County's plight of limited affordable housing?*

Yes, this legislation should be revisited during the next council term. By any livability metric, Howard County is a very desirable place to live. Moving forward, we require a balance growth approach to preserve our unique character. Yes, it is inevitable that more residential communities will be built spurred by consumer demand. To accomplish this feat, local adequate public facilities ordinances (APFO) must be met, namely infrastructure and schools.

Whenever I speak with builders and developers, they voice concern over untenable APFO mandates. Most notably, school overcapacity plagues large portions of Howard County. In my view, we simply cannot build physical structures to meet this student demand in the short term and be left with aging and unused infrastructure after this bulge works its way through the system. Instead, we have got to be more creative in how we use existing facilities.

7. *Do you share the concern that our road and transit infrastructure is inadequate to accommodate the jobs and development coming to Howard County and the region?*
  - a. *What are your top priorities for transit, transportation, infrastructure, and public facilities investment in the County?*
  - b. *How would you work with neighboring counties, state and federal authorities to address these deficiencies and secure the resources needed to improve these public facilities?*

Since moving to Howard County in 2005, I have been struck by just how many of my friends and neighbors work in either DC or Baltimore. To manage this arduous commute, they rely on public transportation, mainly the commuter bus system.

For reasons passing understanding, Howard County has been reluctant to be a part of the Metro system. Perhaps, this fact stems from the county's farming persona. Be that as it may, we still need to provide adequate means to get folks to work. Therefore, I would propose offering more funding for public transportation.

Of course, in time this problem should be self-correcting because post-pandemic a lot of people will continue to work remotely. Also, the advent of ZIP cars and Uber will help to alleviate some of the stress as we delve deeper into the 21st century.

8. *Once each decade, Howard County updates its General Plan, a long-range, visionary document that guides land use, growth, and development decisions. In your opinion, what should this document prioritize as it relates to neighborhoods, employment centers, and overall planning themes?*

Under the administration of Howard County Executive Calvin Ball, we have made significant strides in affordability. By implementing his Housing Opportunities Master Plan, we can lay claim to real opportunities for affordable homeownership for those of limited means.

To ensure growth, on May 18, 2021, Executive Ball noted that \$5 million had been earmarked for the Housing Opportunities Trust Fund. At the end of the day, the idea is a simple one – we need more moderate-income housing units. Our current stock cannot meet the demand found throughout the county. To combat this shortcoming, we must: (1) revise land use, planning and zoning regulations where appropriate; (2) improve existing policies and find other creative solutions; and (3) balance infrastructure concerns moving forward.

The shining example of how things can be done in a productive manner is Patuxent Commons. This project is desperately needed right now because the median home sale price in Howard County is north of \$500,000 and a one-bedroom apartment costs more than \$1,700 a month in rent. This timely enterprise consists of 76 total units, 19 for those with disabilities, 30 for seniors and 27 for families.

To date, current zoning practices require developers of new housing starts to set aside generally anywhere from 10-15% of housing stock for those who have moderate income. This set of potential and eager buyers consists of (1) first time homebuyers, (2) county government employees, (3) HCPSS personnel, and (4) those working for nonprofits. These valued members of our community ought to be able to live where they work.

*9. What are your plans to address and incentivize redevelopment of existing commercial properties in the County?*

As I stated prior, I am staunch advocate for reasonable, sustainable growth. To thrive Howard County will have to undergo redevelopment for expanded commercial use. Case in point, the Route 1 Corridor is a promising opportunity to convert existing commercial enclaves into economic zones. Moving forward, we should seek to build innovation hubs where entrepreneurship is the prevailing culture. Advancement in technology and science will command our economic future. Therefore, we ought to foster an environment which draws in cutting edge, competitive, and ethical business entities. To achieve this outcome, we must implement the idea of beneficial projects as contained in the 2030 General Plan – the adoption of a tiered incentive program that provides benefits commensurate with any proposed project’s overall potential for Howard County.

*10. Coupled with the implementation of a new General Plan is the re-writing of zoning and land-use regulations that will affect the county for generations.*

- a. How prepared are you to address the many issues that will confront you in this process? What are the top three issues?*
- b. Please share your zoning and land use philosophy.*
- c. What do you hope to see as the result of this process?*

If elected, my first priority would zero in on the Route 1 Corridor. Thankfully, Robert Charles Lesser & Company (RCLCO) has pointed us in the right direction. Case in point, this area consists of only 8% of Howard County but it generates 30% of our job base. Therefore, it only makes sense that we promote mixed use development to create the necessary office space and STEM-related labs so that a creative class can coalesce in this region.

My second priority would be the Snowden River Parkway area. I wholeheartedly agree with the market demand assessment performed by RCLCO. The firm determined that this swath of land (less than 1% of Howard County) yields 5% of our jobs. This is another golden opportunity to erect Class A office space combined with mixed-use development.

My third priority would be to redouble our efforts along the Route 40 Corridor. Of late, we have seen a marked increase in demand for the Columbia village centers. Arguably, this coveted space has matured and there exists abundant potential

through rezoning for mixed use. Such a move would be consistent with the new urbanism throughout the U.S.

My land use philosophy it is quite straightforward – land should not remain fallow. As wise stewards, we must apply utilitarian logic. The pressing question is always: How can we obtain the greatest amount of good for the most folks in Howard County with our land use policies?

Staying proactive will safeguard the future for the next generation of Howard County residents. To maintain our enviable productivity, we must implement probusiness policies that underscore STEM-related enterprises.

## Education

11. *How will you support Howard County's educational standards while balancing the needs of our residents and businesses?*
- a. *Do you believe that the Board of Education has used its Capital budget responsibly to meet the top needs of the schools?*
  - b. *Do we need to institute changes that require the Board of Education to better use existing school capacity?*
  - c. *What changes in the HCPSS budget process would you consider?*

At present, Howard County allocates \$750,000,000 toward education. Compared to other school jurisdictions this is vast sum of money. Therefore, we must revisit how those dollars are disbursed. Are we spending too much on technology in the classroom? Is there too much administrative bloat that could be curtailed? I know firsthand that teachers often are forced to pay out of pocket for necessary supplies. Why is this so in one of the wealthiest counties in the nation? To be frank, it's rather embarrassing for teachers to ask for donations from parents during *Back-to-School Night*.

Since we have been fortunate to weather the economic fallout from the pandemic, we should see an upward adjustment in property taxes based on robust market valuations. It stands to reason that this main source of revenue will only grow given the favorable demand for District 4 neighborhoods like Maple Lawn, Enclave at River Hill, and Brighton Estates.

## Closing Comments

12. *Is there anything you would like to share about your campaign or vision that we have not asked?*

CO<sub>2</sub> emissions is taking a huge toll on our planet. The extant scientific literature suggests that if we fail to curb our collective behavior, the planet temperature will rise gradually yet steadily, and this phenomenon will have devastating consequences.

To do our part, we need to move from combustible engines to mitigate the release of this greenhouse gas. In Fulton, I have noticed a marked increase in electric vehicles (EVs). Anecdotal evidence suggest that more folks are buying Tesla, largely for this reason. Also, the switch to EVs makes sense given inflated gasoline prices at the pump.

As we move deeper into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, our usage of electricity will only skyrocket. Every decision to invest in our electrical infrastructure is designed to fortify the success of our future. To meet this inevitable energy demand, I believe that we ought to invest in fortifying our electrical infrastructure and support grid throughout Howard County.