

## Twinbrook Community Association Municipal Candidate Questionnaire

Name Charles Littlefield

Neighborhood of Residence East Rockville

Office Seeking Rockville City Council

**TCA does not and will not endorse any candidates, and solely acts as a clearinghouse for information to assist the community in making a decision on which candidates they will vote for.** Answers to the following questions will be presented in their entirety to the entire Twinbrook community. It will be posted on the TCA website at [www.twinbrookcommunity.org](http://www.twinbrookcommunity.org), and the link will be shared on the TCA Facebook page and Twitter feed.

Please send your completed questionnaire to Marissa Valeri at [Twinbrook.President@gmail.com](mailto:Twinbrook.President@gmail.com) by 5 PM on October 1, 2019.

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1. What do you identify as the number one challenge facing Rockville today and how do you propose to address it?

The number one challenge facing Rockville today is how to manage growth and development in a way that maintains our quality of life, and leaves no resident feeling excluded or at odds with their community. The way to address this is to have people on the city council and planning commission that are independent thinkers, not afraid to listen to both residents and developers, not afraid to keep an open mind, and not afraid to regulate development so that it produces balanced results respectful of our City's wide range of opinions about the same. If elected, I would address this issue the way I have during my last seven years on the Rockville Planning Commission, by carefully applying the Smart Growth approach to development to the specific geography of Rockville. The main tenet of smart growth is 'build where there is existing infrastructure in order to protect vast areas of wilderness.' For Rockville, our existing infrastructure is the entire stretch of 355 from Twinbrook Parkway to Shady Grove, as well as the areas within walking distance of the Twinbrook and Rockville metro stations. Our new master plan and accompanying zoning laws should steer new development into these areas. Additionally, our annual budget should prioritize infrastructure in these areas and our City staff, officials and volunteers should spend as much of their working hours as they can at solving problems and maximizing quality of life there. Our vast areas of wilderness are our three golf courses and our existing City-owned park system. By the tenet of Smart Growth, we must conserve as much of these areas as we can, especially those farthest from existing infrastructure. Redgate Golf Course is a perfect example—it is an awful place to put more housing: it has no existing infrastructure, is beyond walking distance of stores and transit, and is accessed by one of the most narrow, winding roads (Avery) in our City. Trying to do anything there will sap our attention from the areas where we need to be most focused. Also, there are many in this City who value nature and want to maintain their right to access that land. Lastly, neighborhoods should have a direct say over their future development; nothing should be mandated upon them by people in other parts of the City.

2. What is the role of City government in addressing housing affordability issues in Rockville and what would you do to encourage the production of more affordable homes for working families?

First, we should follow the federal government definition of affordable housing which is a household that pays 30 percent or less of its income on housing—this definition applies to both existing homeowners and renters, not just those lucky enough to buy a brand new home. Second, the City's affordable housing efforts should be directed at people who already live in Rockville (and have lived here the longest). If these residents needs are being met, then we should consider creating a work-reside program for employers (offset by incentives to build work-force housing) so that people already employed in Rockville are next in line to become residents here. We also need to realize that affordable housing is not just a problem of short supply: real wages in the US are only a fraction of what they use to be in the 1960s/70s. Setting a higher minimum wage is best left to the state or county, but the City can do its part by working harder to attract more, and higher-paying, businesses. Other effective things the City can do: consult with neighborhoods to find areas where zoning can be changed to allow more accessory housing, establish tiny homes communities on unused parking lots, create a public-private partnership between small-scale contractors and large developers to build the "missing middle," and actively pursue the redevelopment of aging strip malls into small neighborhood-friendly village centers, with stores on the ground floor and 2-3 floors of apartments on top.

3. How do you feel about the transportation options currently available in our city? Do we have enough options? How would you mitigate those concerns or change the situation?

Rockville is blessed with three metro stops and they are among our City's greatest assets. Compared to the metro, however, our public bus system is slower and less reliable. It is possible that a better bus system (e.g. BRT) could eventually be developed, but this is a project best left to the state or county to pursue. In terms of transportation options, the City should focus mainly on ways to increase the two most environmentally modes of transport, walking and biking. To promote walking, the City should improve pedestrian safety (see Question 6 below), consider walkability when drafting planning and zoning laws, and explore new ways to promote walkability as part of a work-reside policy or workforce housing project. With respect to biking, we need to invest in, insist on, and strategically locate safe, separated lanes for bikes, scooters and similar modes of transport. Considering the recent advent of ride-sharing and new technologies such as electric and self-driving cars, it is unclear whether private cars or public transit will become our main mode of future transport—we may even get a hybrid between the two. We should thus be cautious about permanently removing existing car lanes; instead, we should monitor what other cities are doing to better accommodate these new trends and reduce the impact that cars have on the environment.

4. Do you believe Rockville's APFO (Adequate Public Facilities Ordinance) is working as intended? Why or why not? What changes would you propose?

This question—by asking if the APFO is “working” or not—seems specifically directed at the ordinance's school standard, rather than water, sewer or transportation capacity. Real estate developers have long hated the APFO and have consistently gone out of their way to propagandize the issue by exaggerating and misrepresenting the facts. Their efforts have been directed at converting residents into their spokespeople, since they know that the public expects them to be naturally biased against it. Top 10 things to clarify about the APFO: 1) it is not intended to reduce school overcrowding, only new schools can solve that problem; 2) it is intended to more efficiently allocate new development to areas with available school capacity, while slowing down development in overcrowded areas, so that the school

construction cycle can catch up; 3) APFOs are common across America and the State of Maryland, and not some strange thing we invented here in Rockville; 4) other highly rated Maryland cities with APFOs set their threshold at 80%-90% school capacity, which occurs before schools become overcrowded; Rockville's threshold is 120%, which occurs after a school is overcrowded; 6) our APFO doesn't stall development in the Rockville Town Center as all pending developments in that area were grandfathered in when the law was passed; 7) when an area goes into moratorium, it only applies to multi-family housing, across a limited area and for a limited time period, commercial and other types of development can still proceed; 8) the APFO's exemption on senior housing benefits senior citizens—who live on a fixed income and are the most harmed by high housing prices—along with their Gen X and Millennial children that may eventually need to support them; 9) MCPS will neither reward nor punish Rockville because of its APFO, they will address capacity according to their own criteria; and 10) if we do feel a key development is being held up by our APFO, the best solution is not to weaken our ordinance but to create a waiver that would only apply for large developers willing to provide extra benefits to the City as part of their overall project.

5. How do you plan on maintaining a balance between environmental sustainability and economic development?

To maintain a balance between environmental sustainability and economic development first requires a mental and spiritual commitment to the notion that the two things are not mutually exclusive. Unfortunately, there are too few people willing to take this first step; they believe that balance is achieved by haggling over trade-offs. Most people like trees and nature, and enjoy the benefits of living in a "green" city, while also valuing jobs and a growing economy. One concrete example of a win-win solution for both economic development and environmental sustainability: make better use of trees. The City currently has no laws or incentives for deciduous trees (which require no new technology) to be planted on the south-facing sides of buildings, nor to even require that buildings oriented their walls, windows, etc. in a way that maximizes the heating-cooling benefits of passive solar. We could exempt developers from planting trees on north-facing areas if they were to agree to make better use of trees and passive solar on south-facing areas. The developer would add value to their project by lowering their customers utility bills, and without any additional tree requirement. This type of idea is how the environmental movement first began to first get traction with corporations, namely when companies realized that not only were they polluting but they were also losing money by not making the most efficient use of their industrial inputs. There are a lot of ideas like this; we just need to find them, test them, improve them, and make them part of how we simultaneously help business and the planet.

6. How will you implement the City's commitment to Vision Zero? What strategies will you use to effectively partner with the County and State to ensure that Vision Zero is a reality?

Vision Zero was first presented to the planning commission during our initial review of transportation for the City's 2040 master plan. There was some uncertainty around its applicability here in Rockville and I believe I was the only commissioner that voted in favor of it. I voted that way not because of Vision Zero, but because I am committed to saving people's lives. Well before "Vision Zero" was even mentioned here, I repeated its basic tenet many times to developers, city staff and members of the public—namely, that no other issue, including the environment, education or the economy, should take precedence over issues of life and death. More precisely, government should not try to place a cost-benefit monetary value on a person's life. Protecting people requires capital investment, not just talk, and I worry that policy makers will spend more time tossing around this new catchy phrase, amongst themselves and with their state and county peers, rather than investing in effective solutions.

For me an effective solution is one that actually reduces the risk of a fatality to zero, not just one that "envisions" it. What are some investments that would provide pedestrians a "zero-risk" way to cross the street? The answer: bridges and tunnels. My strategy would be to start working with the state and county—as well as with developers—to find a way to jointly fund such a safe crossing, for the thousands of pedestrians that live west of Rockville Pike and walk to the Twinbrook metro station as part of their daily commute. Both the Rockville and White Flint metro stations already have such crossings; it is not fair that the Twinbrook metro—where significant population growth is occurring and pedestrian accidents frequently occur—is left behind. Ideally this would be an architecturally pleasing Gateway bridge welcoming people to Rockville, but I'd be equally fine with a cheap ugly bridge, because—as I've said—nothing is more important than a person's life.

7. As Rockville's population continues to grow and diversify, do you support increasing the size of the City Council to offer more opportunities for representation? How do you plan to involve residents from all corners of Rockville in the decision making process if you are elected?

Yes, I support increasing the size of the City Council. Every ten years or so, our City appoints a group of citizens to review the City's charter and explore ways to improve it. I served on the last Charter Review Commission in 2012. Ultimately, only our recommendation to switch to four-year terms was passed into law, however, we also recommended increasing the number of councilmembers from four to six (thus seven members total, counting the mayor). I still support this recommendation as our city council is too small for a City of our size and diversity. Another idea we discussed was electing a council member for each of Rockville's ten voting wards. I am somewhat neutral on that idea, however, one idea we should consider is participatory budgeting, a concept popular in other countries but virtually non-existent in the US. Rockville, however, might be a good place to try. The idea, basically, is to give a small but meaningful amount of budget authority to the City's various boards and commissions, and civic associations. For example, if we allocated \$25,000 to the Traffic & Transportation Commission, they would get to decide which traffic improvement to spend it on. Similarly, for say the Twinbrook Civic Association. This would decentralize the decision-making process, and involve more residents by allowing them to have more direct impact.

8. Are you satisfied with Rockville's city-manager form of government? If not, how would you propose changing it?

I have not always been satisfied with our city-manager form of government; sometimes I believe that city staff have too much control over the flow of information, which can impair the ability of our mayor and council to have adequate oversight, as well as the planning commission's ability to objectively review and/or condition development approvals. It helps to hear from members of the public in such cases. I have also heard complaints from people about poor enforcement of city codes; I believe our city-manager form of government might be partly to blame, since mayor and council deal more with legislation and budget, than with enforcement. Nevertheless, I am not sure that the solution is to eliminate the city-manager form of government; a better option would be to increase the level of oversight by making the mayor and council full-time positions and/or having more councilmembers. Also, I have seen our city-manager system improve over the years, especially under our current city manager. Thus, I would not propose changing it at the current time.

9. Do you support protecting equal rights for all individuals in Rockville, regardless of gender, race, age, religion, ethnic origin, disability, immigration status, sexual orientation or gender identity?

Yes. One right that is currently not enjoyed by some residents, on the basis of immigration status, is the right to vote. Some cities, such as Takoma Park, allow non-citizens to vote in their city elections. The City should host an open discussion to see how Rockville voters feel about extending voting rights to our non-citizen residents. As for other types of discrimination: I stood up for minorities when I chaired the planning commission, including an orthodox Jewish synagogue near Montrose that city staff wanted to regulate far beyond that of other churches in our City, as well as a low-income housing area in East Rockville that was not properly informed of a nearby development project. Although Rockville is a progressive place, those in government need to be vigilant for instances of discrimination that may occur as part of our day-to-day government processes.

10. If you received a \$1 million grant to use for the city any way you wanted, what would you do with it and why?

If I could line up other entities to contribute or finance the remaining costs, I would use the money to build a bridge across Rockville Pike near the Twinbrook metro station. If I could only depend on that \$1 million, I would use it to establish a public-private partnership to fund new ideas, new local businesses, or new types of development, such as workforce housing or the renovation of strip malls into village centers with ground-floor shops and 2-3 stories of apartments on top.