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Neighborhood of Residence: Monroe Street & previously Twinbrook

Office Seeking: City Council

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

Rockville's main challenge is ensuring our high quality of life. This is why my campaign theme is "Keeping Rockville the City We Love." Rockville residents consistently tell me that they appreciate the services and amenities the city provides, but our challenge is to maintain this level of service without increasing taxes. Our police, parks, recreation programs, snowplowing, and other valued services all require a growing, diversified tax base. Rockville, and Montgomery County generally, have lagged Northern Virginia in this regard. Rockville must join with other jurisdictions in Maryland to leverage our strengths through a formal coalition, so that Rockville can thrive with new jobs for our residents, and especially our young adults entering the workforce.

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?

Housing affordability is an important issue for me, one I have been involved with for a long time. Before ever living in Rockville, I worked for Montgomery Housing Partnership when we built Beall's Grant, a mixed-income community on North Washington Street. Professionally, I have already worked to bring affordable housing to Rockville.

More than 10,000 Rockville households, including 53% of renters and 29% of homeowners, are cost burdened with housing because they spend 30% or more on housing (and many of these are severely cost-burdened with housing costing half of their income.) We need to fix this situation. The city must improve its reputation and have leaders that are seen as partners who will work with nonprofit affordable housing providers and the county to welcome new housing initiatives.

The Washington Council of Governments (COG) recently issued a report highlighting the affordable housing crisis in the region. Montgomery County alone needs to add over 23,000 low-cost housing units by 2030. Millennials and Generation Z are trying to get a toehold in the rental market and become first-time home buyers. Many of these are our own children, such as my sons. Rockville has about 800 babies born to residents each year. Given our central position in the county and our access to transit, Rockville should set a goal to meet its share of the low-cost housing needed in the county.

As a councilmember, I will build upon my previous work in this area and favor land use policies that promote the creation of housing by transit centers. When people live closer to their work and in places with good access to public transportation, our roadways see less traffic. As a local government we can step in to counteract the market forces that are not meeting the demand for high-density, modestly-priced housing by growing a local housing trust fund and creating medium-density and high-density housing zones. We also should take a deep dive into analyzing the barriers for market-rate construction. A larger supply of housing brings down the cost of housing. Through the Rockville Housing Authority, we must continue to preserve naturally-occurring affordable housing such as we did with Fireside Park. We can also modify the Moderately Priced Dwelling Unit program to include a broader range of households.

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?

Our transit options are generally robust in Rockville. We are lucky to have two metro rail stops in the city and one across the street from the city line. Our county is thriving around metro rail stations. Getting Metro to stop turnarounds at Grosvenor was a big win for us. More reliable and frequent service at our local stations enhances their value to the city. We need to do more in partnership with WMATA to improve the passenger experience at our outdated stations, including replacing the pedestrian bridge over MD355 at the Rockville metro.

As a member of Montgomery County's Microtransit Task Force, I've been involved with the pilot program for the new FLEX on-demand bus service around Rockville metro/Fireside Park/Hungerford. This pilot area suffers from a lack of transit service during the day and at night. My hope is that this new technology, that picks passengers up when needed and brings them where they need to go within a set zone, will eliminate many of our "transit deserts" without continually circulating a bus that is not as user-friendly and would have to run through areas that do not have a need.

Although I know there were concerns about the new Montgomery County FLASH Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) line along Veirs Mill Road, it will bring branded, limited-stop service that will improve transit travel time with queue jumps at congested intersections, high-tech new bus stops, and pedestrian and bicycle improvements. The convenience, faster service, and updated sidewalks will add value to the neighborhood.

I would also like to see us improve access to Town Center from the Montgomery College area, possibly with new bus-on-demand service or by implementing Mark Pierzchala's idea of a direct walker-biker path through county and city land that could be used by rental bikes, e-bikes, and motorized scooters.

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

The APFO has generally performed well for the capacity factors over which Rockville exercises some control like water/sewer and traffic. It's not working as well with the schools standard because Rockville has no direct control over school capacity within the city limits. This means Rockville essentially forfeits our control of development to Montgomery County Public Schools. Obviously, we do not want overcrowded schools. As president of Richard Montgomery High School PTSA, we were distraught to lose the funding for an addition to the building two years ago after we went through the architectural phase. MCPS suddenly eliminated the funding for the addition in order to build a new Crown High School. Because the new high school would not be completed as quickly as the addition, MCPS basically pulled the rug out from under our city. This decision immediately halted Rockville's ability to go forward with the Twinbrook Quarter Champion project plan. One school decision should not halt a 30-year plan that would bring a billion dollar investment to the city, create 3,450 jobs, and produce \$69.3 million in net tax revenue, which is why the Mayor and Council supported an exemption from the city's school capacity test for the Twinbrook Quarter. We need to have a constructive conversation in the city about whether we are well-served by the APFO schools standard. We also must work closely with our county and state partners to ensure the City of Rockville has sufficient school capacity to implement our smart growth plans by lobbying the state legislature and governor to fully fund school construction (such as with the Build to Learn Act). Other immediate ideas that do not require resources for construction include advocating for online courses in virtual classrooms for qualified high school students, additional consortium school choice programs, and sensible school boundary changes.

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

Smart economic development at transit stations is the main way Rockville can be environmentally sustainable. Concentrating our housing and job growth near our transit stations is the kind of economic development that promotes environmental wellness because it results in fewer miles traveled on our roads and the environmental costs associated with that pattern of commuting. A sustainable environment is essential for a thriving economy and is made possible when shopping and taking care of daily necessities can occur without vehicle trips. When electricity is produced exclusively from renewable sources such as wind or solar, we can set policies for new buildings to use electricity. Companies that provide solar and green roofs to buildings can both bring environmental sustainability and economic business success to the city.

How will you implement the City's commitment to Vision Zero?

The state has only just passed a bill for Vision Zero and has not yet begun implementation. Meanwhile, the county adopted a two-year action plan two years ago and has not made any progress at all. After being involved in a pedestrian accident where the driver was at fault, I've become a staunch pedestrian safety advocate. It's extremely important to elect someone like me who will make sure Vision Zero is a priority and, after we agree on our city's action plan, that it is implemented. We will need to be a strong, unified voice to force the county and state to abide by Vision Zero standards. It's obvious that it won't happen without very strong advocacy from the city, regular meetings involving all three levels of government, and definitive dates for the accomplishment of each action item. The mayor and council will need to reinforce Vision Zero as a priority to the city manager so that proper staffing and budgeting can make it a reality.

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?

Last time this question was on the ballot, I voted against expanding the number of council members but I have definitely changed my mind. Rockville has grown tremendously since we adopted the five-member mayor/council format. Residents will be better served by a seven-member body that represents a broader spectrum of residents. We also saw that the city was not well-served when a vacancy occurred, leaving a four-member council that often struggled to reach consensus. A larger body would make this less likely to happen.

Effective communication to Rockville residents has been a longtime passion of mine. The first step in making sure everyone is involved with decision making is to make sure they know they are welcome with language translations, diversity in images, and invitations to participate. When the Rockville Central community hub was created in 2007, we successfully involved residents from all corners of Rockville to participate in our local issues. One of the main laments I hear while canvassing is that residents no longer know what is going on since we do not have a newspaper. I had tried to fill this need for two years with Rockville View. It's difficult for residents to participate in the decision making process when they are unaware of the issues facing the city. Clearly more needs to be done in terms of community engagement and I look forward to providing a regular emailed newsletter to residents, continuing to write about news and issues while inviting comments on CynthiaForRockvilleCityCouncil.com, and experimenting with new ways to communicate, such as with online town halls that use video conferencing.

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

Yes, Rockville is well-served by its professional municipal managers. I think Rockville residents, so many of whom are professional public servants themselves, value the skill and technical competence of Rockville city staff. I would not propose changing it. If anything, I would like to see a commitment from the mayor and council to interfere less and I would demand an end to micromanaging city affairs from the dais. The Mayor and Council are to "make policy and establish a vision, and goals, for the city. The city manager, appointed by the Mayor and Council, makes recommendations to the Mayor and Council, and is responsible for day-to-day management of city operations." The mayor and council should stick to giving clear guidance to the city manager and let him execute it rather than directing and publicly admonishing city staff. We need to reinforce the council's fidelity to the city manager model of government and elect and reelect the leaders who abide by it. This is a priority for me and all of Team Rockville.

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

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

There are many exciting projects I'd like to do such as new walking and biking paths over the railroad tracks in Twinbrook and Lincoln Park, a grand walkway from the Rockville metro to Town Center, and a new mixed-income housing community by transit. However, a million dollars isn't enough for any one of them! It's only enough to add about ten miles of safe bike lanes separated from traffic by dividers or about two miles of new sidewalks. After taking all this into consideration, I would love to take \$1 million and start a nonprofit Rockville newspaper both in print and online with high quality professional journalism focused on local affairs. The marketplace has not provided this essential service to the city and the entire city will be well-served by unbiased reporting of the late night decisions in city hall. We need a space for the promotion of all the events, activities, and programs and the sharing of stories about new initiatives in the city so we all know what's going on.