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Neighborhood of Residence: 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?

While I am focused on multiple important issues in this campaign, I think the top challenge facing Rockville is job creation. Many residents, like myself, commute an hour or more to a job in D.C. or Virginia. We can and should do more to encourage job creation right here in Rockville. Rockville has many of the important inputs businesses and other organizations want, including skilled and educated residents, educational opportunities, and transportation infrastructure. What's missing are places for businesses to locate and the support to allow local small businesses to grow. We can do more with REDI to support local businesses and new entrepreneurs through grants and loans, and we can also allow commercial spaces built in the 60's and 70's to turn over so they're attractive to modern businesses. Lastly, we can do more to partner with existing companies, non-profits, and the federal government to make Rockville an attractive place to locate offices.

Not only will this create jobs for Rockville residents, commercial taxes will benefit our city, helping to control property taxes for homeowners and hopefully allowing us to complete long overdue infrastructure projects, like fixing our roads and making them safer for pedestrians and vehicles.

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?

I absolutely believe the City government has a role to play in addressing housing affordability issues, and I don't think the city has done enough. I serve as the Vice-Chair on the board of Rockville Housing Enterprises – the City's public housing authority – and I have over a decade of professional experience in the housing sector. There are several strategies the city government can pursue to improve housing affordability in Rockville.

First, a major contributor to the housing affordability crisis is a lack of housing supply. We need to allow housing to be built, especially near public transportation. Allowing the construction of housing will go a long way to improving housing affordability. Focusing the construction on transit-oriented development reduces the need car-based trips, which has both economic and environmental benefits.

For increasing the supply of specifically affordable housing, we should increase the requirements for inclusive zoning and moderately-priced dwelling units (MPDUs). This would include increasing the amount of MPDUs required in new developments, as well as requiring larger 3-to-4 bedrooms options to accommodate working families, a major gap in local affordable housing. Additionally, the city should adopt "net-gain" policies for new development, requiring not one-to-one, but one-to-more replacement of any affordable housing.

Additionally, I would like the city to become more active in purchasing naturally occurring affordable housing. For example, several years ago Rockville Housing Enterprises (RHE) purchased Fireside Apartments, using low-income housing tax credits. This preserved 234 affordable units, with half being operated as subsidized housing and half as "market rate". Since RHE is a mission-based public housing authority, the "market rate" units are not priced significantly above the affordable units. Broadening this approach would ensure the long-term operation and stability of affordable housing in our communities.

Finally, I have spoken personally and publicly about the need for more affordable housing in Rockville, both when the subject of the Twinbrook Quarter development came before the city council and in my multiple interviews for the city council vacancy left by Councilmember Palakovich-Carr earlier this year. In addition, I have supported the county-wide legislation in favor of lessening the restrictions on Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs), which will produce more affordable rental units. Addressing housing affordability issues allows new residents to join our community, all of whom will pay property taxes to the city, shop at local businesses, and create more jobs in the area for both new and existing residents. No policy is a silver bullet, but by adopting a broad-based approach, we can support housing affordability for current and future residents in our community.

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?

Mass transit and public transportation are key to the future prosperity of Rockville and our surrounding communities. Thousands of Rockville residents, just like me, depend on Metro, MARC, buses, and other transit options for their daily commute. And we can do even more, particularly to improve public transit options outside of peak commuting hours.

For transit, we must address two concerns. First, we need to continue to improve our options to make transit consistently cheaper and easier than driving. This includes recent improvements to Metro like eliminating the turnback of trains before they reached Rockville. That small change has significantly improved ridership on Metro. But we must also improve transit options within Montgomery County and Rockville. This includes options like the proposed Bus Rapid Transit (BRT), which would allow people to move and commute quickly within Montgomery County. Also, as a consultant, I was involved in the Houston bus re-route plan that significantly improved their ridership; we should encourage a full-review of the bus system in Montgomery County and Rockville.

Secondly, we need to improve transportation options within our city, and make day-to-day getting around without a car easier. And safer! Both Rockville and Montgomery County have seen too many pedestrian and cyclist deaths and injuries. We need to fully implement Vision Zero. We need to improve bike paths, sidewalks, and pedestrian access so alternative means of transportation are less dangerous and more welcoming.

Additionally, we must also be skeptical of “solutions” that waste precious transportation resources. The widening of I-270 just doesn’t make sense, particularly when large scale transit options would be much more efficient and effective at reducing congestion. We should advocate for more transportation dollars – both state and local – to go toward transit and alternative transportation improvements.

Finally, as we did with Twinbrook Quarter, Rockville should focus any new development on transit-oriented projects close to Metro stations, to minimize the need for personal vehicles for commutes, errands, and other daily tasks. We should require that new developments include accommodations for pedestrians and cyclists as well, so our community has all the transportation options it needs to thrive.

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

I have a kindergartner and a two-year old, so I have a vested interest in the quality of Rockville schools. Our schools must have the money and the capacity they need to educate the next generation of Rockville’s children. And I have a hard time agreeing that the APFO is working as intended when moratoriums and potential moratoriums threaten to cut Rockville and Montgomery County off from the commercial taxes and impact fees we need to build new schools and invest in other public infrastructure. Without the taxes and fees

from commercial construction like the recent Twinbrook Quarter, the city and the school system will not have the revenue we need to build schools or repair infrastructure, like Twinbrook's storm water management system or local streets.

First, we need more consistent advocacy with the County and MCPS. Rockville's school clusters are dealing with substantial capacity issues while other schools within the county are under capacity. We need to be involved early and often advocating for our schools, not just when there is an emergency situation like occurred with Twinbrook Quarter. I believe we should create an Education Commission to consistently advocate for Rockville schools with the county and state, not solely rely on individual PTAs to fill this important role. Just because we don't control the school budget directly, that doesn't mean that the City Council can't be more vocal advocating for increased funding.

Secondly, we have to be involved in the upcoming boundary study. Many local jurisdictions periodically reevaluate school boundaries as a matter of course, and school boundaries should strive to best serve the population they are meant to help, our kids. However, we all also understand the benefits associated with maintaining neighborhood schools. Rockville needs to get directly involved with the boundary study process early, both to address local school capacity issues and also to ensure that Rockville's schools and students are given the attention they deserve.

Finally, I believe the underlying issue is one of capital. Gathering together the tens of millions of dollars needed to build and expand schools quickly is difficult. Especially when the state government withholds and delays needed capital funds. We should consider and study the possibility of establishing a public bank to help finance large scale investments like school construction and public works improvements.

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

First, economic development and sustainability are not opposing goals. The future of economic development - of jobs and opportunity - depends on clean energy sources and sustainable businesses. Without environmental sustainability, true sustainable economic growth is difficult or impossible.

Secondly, economic development must not just acknowledge sustainability. Environmental sustainability must be a central component of economic development. Environmental preservation isn't just an option; it's the key to economic development in Rockville and throughout our region. Retaining green space attracts residents and businesses, as well as reducing storm water runoff, improving health, etc. Encouraging public transit attracts residents and businesses, as well as reducing greenhouse gas emissions and reducing traffic. Building near Metro and transit attracts residents and businesses while reducing the need for car-based trips. Transitioning Rockville to entirely renewable energy attracts residents and businesses while saving the city money.

Finally, specific economic development must come with sustainability requirements. Transit-based development is a good start, but we must also require greenspace and enhanced storm water management with new development. Bicycle and pedestrian concerns must be addressed and improvements incorporated into new developments, including the proposed bicycle and pedestrian crossings with the Twinbrook Quarter Project, which I will advocate for on the Council. This improves long-term environmental sustainability and economic development through projects that are built and designed for the long haul.

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

Pedestrian and bicycle safety should be of the utmost importance to all of us. The number of deaths on our roads and in our crosswalks, particularly recently near Twinbrook, is unacceptable. There are several steps we can take as a city to make our roads safer for all of us including:

1. Partner with the county and state to get HAWK signals for crosswalks on streets with many pedestrian crossings.
2. Establish separate, protected bike lanes, not just sharrows.
3. Install new street lighting and better maintain current street lights, particularly in high-traffic areas.
4. Establish clear, well-marked, well-maintained pedestrian crossings throughout the city, paying particular attention to places where pedestrians often cross without a crosswalk, to get to bus stops or other landmarks.
5. Implement speed-calming design elements on neighborhood streets, particularly those used to “cut through”.
6. Consider making the Town Center Square a pedestrian-only public space.

Most of these approaches will require partnering with MDOT, either because of jurisdictional or financial reasons. We can do more to prioritize Rockville streets with the County as well, advocating for more attention and resources be dedicated to our streets and transportation infrastructure. This means treating MDOT and the County as partners to be consistently engaged.

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?

Absolutely. I believe the Council should be increased by at least two more members (six City Council members, plus the Mayor) and possibly four (eight City Council members, plus the Mayor). We have had the same number of City Council members since the 1880’s, when Rockville’s population was closer to 700 than 70,000. I would also consider adopting a ward-based or combination at-large/ward-based Council to ensure representation from all Rockville neighborhoods. For example, no member of the City Council currently lives east of MD 355 (Rockville Pike), which limits the current council’s linkage to a large part of their constituency.

As part of my campaign, I have walked every neighborhood in Rockville and knocked over 5,300 doors throughout the city, from Twinbrook to King Farm to Potomac Woods to Lincoln Park. Outreach is an important part of involving everyone in the democratic process. You can’t and shouldn’t wait for people to come to you. Talking directly with residents gives you a better, more concrete understanding of their issues and concerns. They can show you the potholes; you can watch the cars speed by. If I am elected, I will continue canvassing every neighborhood in the city, knocking on doors to talk to residents directly at least monthly.

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

Yes, I believe the Council-Manager form of government is appropriate for Rockville. The Mayor and City Council set policy, hire the appropriate people, and conduct oversight, much like a business’s board of directors. In my opinion, our primary issues with the city government are representation and deadlocks between members of the City Council, neither of which would be solved by changing the form of government. Changing the form of government would not have allowed the Council to fill the vacancy left by Councilmember

Palakovich-Carr. However, both deadlock and representation issues would be addressed by increasing the size of Rockville's City Council. I believe expanding the Council is the better reform.

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?

I love this question, I thought about it a lot, and I wish I had a more glamorous answer. However, here it goes. First, repave Baltimore Road and Grandin Avenue (and take other requests for repaving abysmal streets from each neighborhood). One of the first things that got me involved in my local issues and the Twinbrook Community Association was the deplorable state of Baltimore Road - where I drive to work every day - and Grandin Avenue - where I drop my kids off at preschool. Both those roads look like someone took a jackhammer to them...though on the plus side, my kids have loved watching the City try to patch Grandin over and over from their preschool playground.

In that time, the City has spent millions of dollars on other discretionary projects but has not managed to finish fixing streets in Twinbrook (or really throughout the east side of Rockville). Fixing that neglect would be my first step. Then, with the rest of my money I would add painted crosswalks and signs to well-traveled, "unofficial" pedestrian crossings and improve bus shelters to make waiting for the bus safer and more comfortable.