

Twinbrook Community Association Municipal Candidate Questionnaire

Name: Mark Pierzchala

Neighborhood of Residence: College Gardens

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, 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 by 5 PM on October 1, 2019.

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

Housing affordability is a problem for most households, and these are caused mainly by counterproductive City policies.

For people new to the Rockville housing market, it has become too expensive for even mid-level income people to live here. A married couple where both are new teachers, cannot afford to buy a house in Rockville. The same is true for new police officers and firefighters. Our children, when they grow up to be young adults, will have difficulty in buying a house here. Similarly, we're seeing apartment rents that are higher than what some people pay for mortgages if the latter homeowners were fortunate enough to buy early enough.

It has also become too expensive for retirees of lesser means to continue to live here.

The Adequate Public Facilities Ordinance, as it has been implemented in Rockville, contributes in great measure to the problem (see below).

The biggest solution is to allow commercially provided housing to spring up much more easily near transit centers, especially in our Town Center and near Twinbrook Metro. We need a lot of new housing and it makes sense to put it near transit, and away from our traditional neighborhoods.

There are some housing programs, such as Moderately Priced Dwelling Units, but these programs provide only for a small percentage of all homes. Their eligibility criteria screen out modestly prosperous people. They have to live elsewhere, but then commute to or through Rockville to jam our streets and highways.

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?

The City must recognize that there is too much housing demand for too little supply. Our laws and our processes discourage, and sometimes prohibit, housing development where it would do the most good. This would be near Metro and other transit centers.

While Twinbrook Quarter was eventually approved on a 4-0 vote, it almost failed because of APFO restrictions. I led the effort to increase the school capacity limit for Champion Projects. But there was a lot of fearmongering and misinformation that led to much opposition. In fact, construction impact fees more than pay for themselves in such projects.

For developers, the City is a very uncertain place to do business. Under the best of circumstances, it takes years to get a major new project started. Some never try and they go elsewhere. The major developers have other places where they can do business. The people that are hurt by these development difficulties are our own children who can't find affordable homes as well as those who serve us such as teachers, police, firefighters, and other public servants.

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?

In general, transportation options are decent. A recent study found only minor gaps in available transportation services. The Urban Land Institute recently suggested the possibility of a circulator between Montgomery College and Town Center. I'm willing to consider this, but there are already 30 or 40 buses each day between the 2 locations (Metro and Ride-On buses).

The things the City could do directly for transportation are limited. If we stop development here, e.g., because of road capacity issues, we force people away from transit and then we see them as commuters. The one thing the City should do is to encourage housing development as mixed use near transit in order to reduce the need for automobiles, and to put people to work closer to where they live.

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

Some people intend the APFO to hinder all development. For them, the APFO is working as intended, except that they would want the law to be tighter.

The official intent of the APFO is to slow development until adequate infrastructure is provided. In this respect, the APFO is an utter failure. It has not solved any infrastructure problems for schools or for roads. Rather, it has reduced resources for school construction. Smart growth projects, like Twinbrook Quarter, pay for more school capacity than school children they generate. In these kinds of cases, the APFO is counterproductive.

The impact of the APFO, and the County's sub-division staging policy, is to take one shortage, such as school capacity, and to create another shortage, that of housing.

The APFO pits current homeowners against those of lesser means, and we should not have to be making that kind of choice.

The solution for school capacity and transit issues is to work the problem at the County level, the major funder.

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

Infill development, such as Twinbrook Quarter, suits both the environment and economic development. You take a bunch of asphalt, and you produce homes near jobs and transit.

With such a smart growth development, you get:

- More trees
- Much better storm water management
 - Also helping to preserve trees downstream from the development
- Housing near transit and jobs
 - Reduction of sprawl
 - Reduction of auto emissions
 - Homes that take less energy
- Better connectivity, and better biking and walking infrastructure.
- Better open space and parks
- Lively, pedestrian oriented streets, parks, and open spaces.
- The developer makes money
- People get homes
- The City gets a higher tax base
- The school system gets more school capacity through impact fees than school children generated from such a smart growth project. It also gets a higher property tax base to support school construction.

What's the problem? In a City such as Rockville, where most development is infill development, and with existing City laws, most development results in far better environmental outcomes, while at the same time, resulting in a much better and sustainable economy.

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, an initiative of former Councilmember Julie Palakovich Carr (also a former Team Rockville member), seeks to reduce or eliminate traffic deaths and injuries for those in the car as well as pedestrians and cyclists.

I have once walked every street in the City, and I have biked every street 4 times. No one knows the City better than I as a pedestrian or cyclist. There are issues with (1) cars, (2) pedestrians and cyclists, and (3) infrastructure.

Cars: These pose the biggest problems. Speeding is rampant, and many drivers don't stop at stop signs, or don't stop before turning right on red. Another huge problem with drivers is that when they want to turn right, they look left (to see the oncoming traffic). Drivers know what they're supposed to do, they just don't do it. It's not an education problem, it's an I-don't-care problem. Better enforcement is the answer. I fully support the continued use of speed and red-light cameras. These work where they are placed, and the video that they use, support the fines. We can have more police enforcement, but this is expensive and would tax our limited number of officers. Additionally, if an officer issues a ticket, any fine is paid to the state, not the City.

Pedestrians and cyclists: As one of the more active pedestrians and cyclists, it pains me to say that these people are also a problem. This is true with distracted walking (people watching their phones, not where they're walking). Pedestrians also bolt across streets far from intersections. Madison Wisconsin

has a law called 'sudden pedestrian movement'. Pedestrians can get a ticket for suddenly bolting into traffic. The City was having issues with U of W students getting flattened by cars. Rockville can try a 'sudden pedestrian movement' law. Cyclists should obey traffic lights and stop signs. I do. It wouldn't bother me at all if cyclists were given tickets for breaking these kinds of laws.

Infrastructure: Our City's pedestrian and cycling infrastructure is not bad and it continues to improve. We have a number of initiatives in place such as 'complete streets' policies and laws. Our new bikeway master plan goes a long way towards providing adequate signage and routes through the City. I do have problems with walk signals that do not work. These are all over the place. I also have an issue with intersections where you can cross a street only on one side of the intersection.

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?

I absolutely support Virginia Onley's initiative to increase the size of the Council from 4 to 6. I would even go to a higher number.

To get across the City participation on the Council, I would consider making some of the Council seats to be districts, while some would continue to be City-wide.

With a population approaching almost 70,000, the cost and time it takes to run effectively can be daunting to new candidates. Running for a district seat would be a much easier entry onto the Council. Rockville is not a small town anymore.

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

The City Manager form of government is perfect for Rockville. In this form of government, the elected body sets the policy while the City Manager implements the policy.

We have problems when elected officials try to be City Executives. This is against Rockville's law, but some try anyway. This creates confusion and puts City employees on the spot.

In a policy-making role, the elected have all the power they need. The power of the budget and the power of land use decisions are awesome powers.

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, and I haven't been shy about it.

Note that when our APFO hinders development, the people most hurt are the marginalized. Our infrastructure problems should be solved by the County providing infrastructure, not by denying commercially available homes for mid-level and lower incomes.

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?

There are 2 projects in Town Center where \$1M could be leveraged to great effect. First is towards extending Maryland Avenue in Town Center from Beall Avenue to Dawson Street, as part of Phase II development in Town Center. The second would be to move some Power lines away from Choice Hotels International, because they want them moved to the other side of 355 (or underground). We

need to keep Choice in Rockville so we would view that as an investment. I would choose the first option.