

## 2019 Municipal Election Candidate Questionnaire

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 after the deadline of October 1, 2019.

\* Required

**Email address \***

Monique4Rockville@gmail.com

**Name \***

Monique Ashton, MPH

**Neighborhood Where You Reside \***

West End. I have lived in both East and West Rockville over the past 15 years.

**Office Seeking \***

City Council

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

There are a number of challenges facing Rockville that I will tackle through community engagement and input, data driven analysis, expert consultations, strategic planning, and collaborations with city staff and council. For the purposes of this question, I believe that our city is need of revitalization and smart growth, while also balancing the need to ensure that our we consider our city's infrastructure needs to protect our residents from untenable school overcrowding, traffic congestion and pedestrian safety issues, and water, sewer, and police needs. I will work with city leaders and communities to help ensure economic vitality, walkable neighborhoods, and safe vibrant spaces for our families to enjoy. As new developments are proposed I will take measures to support and attract small businesses; preserve green space; create opportunities for affordable and workforce housing near transit areas; and promote environmental sustainability while preserving the character of Rockville. I will also work with our city staff to ensure that our approved development is accounted for in forecasting for growth pressures with Montgomery County Public Schools, and I will coordinate at the state and county levels to advocate for adequate school capacity and capital improvement planning. We want growth in Rockville, but we have to be smart and about how we execute that goal.

**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 think that the City can and should continue to help on affordable and workforce housing. Affordable housing is a national crisis and a challenge in Rockville. There a range of efforts that the city can help in:

- 1) **Planning for affordable and workforce housing with smart growth projects** near mass transit. If the city is enabling Champion projects, it can consider increasing the MPDU housing requirement from 15 to 18 percent.
- 2) **Providing more flexibility for participants in the MPDU program.** Currently, residents don't have flexibility to easily scale up or down on housing without leaving the program and

waitlisting back in. For example, a senior who no longer needs the space of a larger home can't easily downsize to a smaller unit that would enable a family to more quickly access the housing it needs, while allowing the senior to downsize. 3) **expanding our work with Rockville Housing Enterprises** to increase the amount of affordable housing options available. There are several programs that are closed/waitlisted. 4) **Expand housing options** so that we foster zoning and development of housing for the **missing middle**. This would help support housing for those who don't quite qualify for MPDUs, but still don't have enough resources to purchase a single family home. This type of housing can range from multi-unit or clustered housing types compatible in scale with single-family homes. This type of approach factors the need for walkable, mixed-use real estate and can help attract young talent and aging demographics. The diversity of this housing would also allow for a spectrum of affordability, including duplexes, fourplexes, and bungalow courts. 5) **Tax credits to support first time home buyers. I would also explore raising the senior tax credit.** As home prices go up, so does the property value of some of the existing homes of our seniors who are on a fixed income. As a result, some seniors feel that they have to sell as they can't afford to stay in the area. We should consider reviewing the impact of this effect and whether increasing the threshold would help seniors age in place.

**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?**

I would like to see more transit options in our city, including: 1) more ways to connect our city from North to South and East to West. 2) implementing the recommendation of the ULI report and helping the population of 15,000 Montgomery College students access Town Center and other business centers. This can help support the economic vitality of our business centers while also addressing the concerns of Montgomery College students. 3) Expanding access to mass transit across the city as well as helping those who travel north of the city utilize less cars that clog up 270 and our neighborhoods. 4) Create safe spaces for multimodal transportation including safer options to bike and walk. 5) Working with the County to align and expand the Ride On Flex pilot to areas of high need and to our business centers. I am pleased that our Mayor and County leaders worked with WMATA to eliminate the train turnbacks at the Grosvenor-Strathmore station, which has helped with faster commute options.

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

The Adequate Public Facilities Ordinance (APFO) is an important tool that helps to ensure that we keep pace with sufficient public infrastructure to support development before the approval of certain plans and permits. The city adopted the APFO and Adequate Public Facilities Standards (APFS) to establish minimum service standards for public facilities and services such as roads, police, sewer, water, and schools. New developments are required to perform studies to determine if the capacity of certain public facilities could accommodate new development and redevelopment and, if deemed appropriate, require that their impacts be mitigated prior to approval. This helps our city plan and keep pace with the infrastructure needs to ensure we maintain a higher quality of life and services that Rockville residents deserve and expect.

Residents expect a thoughtful and balanced growth approach to ensure pedestrian safety, traffic management, and infrastructure. The City does not control capacity and improvement projects for our schools. However, we can contribute to how overcrowded schools become. Currently, our APFO allows for schools to be 120 percent overcapacity, which is already high. Our schools represent thousands of residents in our city. Our city must help ensure that our student generation rates and approved projects are factored into the MCPS forecasting so that we can better plan for growth pressures. Portables and overcrowding can have a negative impact on our children's education and we need to work together with

the county and state to ensure our families have access to quality public school education. We also need to work with the County to ensure that we build schools to their capacity in anticipation of growth. I worked with community leaders and the County to push for one of the newest schools in Rockville, Bayard Rustin Elementary School, to be built to its maximum capacity of 740. I am thankful that we were successful because one year after the school was built we already have 730 students in the building. As the County analyzes their APFO, I would work closely with them and MCPS on strategies to foster revitalization while planning for adequate infrastructure.

We also need to look at traffic around new development and work with developers to develop creative approaches to help relieve traffic congestion. For example, I was recently at a community forum and recommended that the developer consider partnering with an area developer on a transit bus that would help residents get to the metro. We also pushed for adequate green and park space.

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

It is a false dichotomy to put environmental sustainability and economic development at odds. With the latest trends in building materials, prefabricated construction, renewable energy solutions, and energy saver technology, building with sustainable standards is not only good for the environment in the long run, but it also makes for good economics for the future habitants of the development and consequently produces more valuable commercial and residential real-estate. As a council-member I will push for smart development policies that protect our environment and the creation of incentives that encourage the use of new environmentally sustainable technologies that will both lower the costs to build and provide for a more environmentally friendly buildings. Additionally we can use renewable energy to lower the cost of energy for low-income residents and make for a more affordable living experience for working class families and seniors. Grid Alternatives is an excellent example of a non-profit implementing this model successfully in other parts of the region. They work to put solar on homes of low-income residents and reduce their energy costs, as well as provide workforce training and jobs to underserved communities to be able to work in the renewable energy space. I would like to see more programs like that in Rockville as well.

**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?**

Pedestrian safety is a serious issue in our city, county, and state. **A quick look at the data:** Across Maryland, there are nearly 3,000 pedestrians who are injured annually. Of all the traffic deaths in Maryland, 20 percent are pedestrians. On average, 400 pedestrians are struck by vehicles in Montgomery County alone. In Rockville, there were 43 bike and pedestrian crashes in 2017, and we know the past year there have been preventable fatalities including a man who was struck this past July in Twinbrook and two people who were struck in Town Center.

The trends we are seeing in our city, mirror challenges that are being faced across the United States, including the growth of our population and more people on the road, the amount of time people spend walking and driving, and the changing nature of car sales to larger vehicles which can have a more severe pedestrian impact than cars, and increase in smartphone use by pedestrians and drivers. In addition, we know that driving slower in neighborhoods can help save lives. A pedestrian hit by a car travelling 20 mph has a 95 percent chance of survival, while someone hit by a car travelling 40 mph has an 85 percent chance of dying.

There are some simple things that we can do to improve bike and pedestrian safety. I support our city, county and state efforts to ensure that Vision Zero becomes a reality. I would also implement our City's Bikeway Master Plan to make biking safer and our communities more connected. Given that our most dangerous hot spots for crashes occur on state and county roads, I think that communication, coordination, and advocacy are critical. As a member of the Pedestrian Advocacy Committee, I have already begun by reviewing and submitting comments to improve and build upon our city's Vision Zero plan, met with City leaders and one of our state delegates to ask questions and share ideas, and started to map out ideas for a pedestrian portal to increase awareness, transparency, and tracking. I will support expanding education, engineering, enforcement, and policies to make our roads and sidewalks safer. I would also work to: increase tracking of what issues residents report so that we can identify trends and address issues, create a transparent portal and move forward on our City's sidewalk development as many of our neighborhoods don't have a safe place for people to walk, examine and address pedestrian crossing issues, and increase education and outreach to drivers and pedestrians and implement efforts on safe schools. I would also work with our city manager to engage with staff to track our progress on Vision Zero on a monthly basis, and do the same with our County and state leaders.

**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?**

Rockville has grown tremendously since the original City Council was designed. There was an advisory referenda question on increasing the number of City Council members that Rockville residents voted on in 2013 and the majority did not agree at that time. Given the growth of our city and the expanded access to voting through Vote by Mail, I think it would be prudent to convene a charter review to consider this question as well as others in the future. I would also recommend putting it to vote before our city residents our to allow for our community members to vote on this topic. I would also recommend community forum.

I also think that there are things that we can do now to engage with diverse community members. I would continue the work to reach Rockville residents through surveys, community forums, outreach to neighborhood associations, and surveys. However, I think that we should do more to reach into other centers of communities where people live, work, and pray, and congregate. I would also like to see more engagement that better represents the mosaic of our city, such as multicultural communities, working families, seniors, millennials, and other minorities. In order to reach underrepresented populations we may need to consider non-traditional ways of engagement, such as outreach through schools, places of worship, affinity groups, and door to door efforts. I would also engage in targeted efforts to welcome new residents to Rockville and engage them in our City.

I also think that it would be beneficial for a debrief with our City staff and candidates who are running after the election. We have uncovered issues and populations who have not been engaged on City matters. We have collected valuable feedback and ideas. I have been advocating on issues as I hear them on the campaign trail, and will continue to do so after the election.

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

**Background:** Before getting into the details of this question, it is important to share that there are several types of municipal structures across the United States: 1) **Commissions** - Voters elect individual

commissioners to a small governing board and each commissioner is responsible for one specific division of city government. One of the commissioners is typically the designated as chairman/woman, who presides over meetings. In this structure, the commission has both legislative and executive functions. This is more of a historic approach to municipal governance and it is currently the least common form of municipal government. 2) **Mayor and Council** - In this structure, the mayor is elected separately from the council, with significant administrative and budgetary authority and city managers have limited administrative authority. Within this category, the mayor could have weak or strong powers 3) **Council-Manager** This is the structure we have in Rockville. Our city has a mayor/council and a professional/civil service city manager who carries out administrative authorities. In Rockville, the city manager is responsible to the mayor and the council for the day-to-day management of city operations. Under provisions of the City Charter and code, the city manager prepares a budget for the Mayor and Council's approval; recruits, hires, and supervises staff; serves as the Mayor and Council's chief administrative officer; implements the city's policies; and provides professional recommendations. This is the most common form of government. Across the United States, this form of government has the highest rate of voter satisfaction according to the International City/County Management Association (ICMA). It is beneficial for Rockville to have a Mayor and Council, as well as a City Manager. A City manager is focused on helping to support the needs of the city on a full-time basis, and does not take time to run campaigns. The city manager is intended to be politically neutral and nonpartisan as they carry out the business of the city. They also help offer continuity as political cycles change. I think this neutrality is important to the administration of the city.

**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, absolutely. I have advocated for equal opportunity throughout my community advocacy, professional work, and volunteer time.

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

In keeping with the responsibility of elected officials to carry out the will of the people, I would first hold a series of community gatherings to solicit input on the prioritization of needs in the community. The second step would be to find ways to leverage this \$1mln grant into a larger pool of capital. We can work with a bank or private fund to utilize this capital as a loan loss reserve or first loss capital in a larger pool of money that could be leveraged to do more in the community.

One of my top priorities is community engagement, I think we all do better when more of us are at the table sharing our perspectives and recommendations. I want to utilize the funds in part to find ways to better engage all parts of Rockville in the governance process. I think that alone would dramatically improve our ability to solve for some of the tougher problems in Rockville.

Next on my list would be the Town Center, I think we could use some portion of the funds to implement some of the recommendations that the ULI consultant report suggested to help us bring new life to that space. The town center is at the center of our city and must be vibrant in order to support the economic growth and opportunity that we want to see in the rest of our city.

I would also use a portion of the money to fund some experimental expansions of city services and projects needed to support our diverse neighborhoods. These would include services for families, seniors,

disabled, really all the communities in Rockville. With the advent of new technology and better ways to communicate, there are certainly a number of ways to rework our existing systems to be cheaper and more efficient and more engaging to the residents of Rockville.