



MCCC 2014 Candidate Questionnaire

Name: Marc Elrich

Email: marc@marcelrich.com **Campaign Website:** marcelrich.com

Office you are seeking: County Council **District:** at-large

Years of residence in the district in which you are running: 54

Education Information

College, Post-graduate, Technical School or Certificate Program you completed and the degree(s) you attained.

Univ of MD, BA History Johns Hopkins, MA Teaching

Employment Information

Current Occupation: councilmember **Current Employer:** Montgomery County Government

How long have you been employed here? 7 1/2 years

If less than two years, please provide immediate previous employer:

Questions

In your opinion, what are the key issues facing the business community in the district/county/state you seek to represent?

There is no "one" business community and the challenges are different depending on the sector. In the service and retail sectors, probably the biggest challenge is the generally slow economy and the lack of strength in the recovery which has impaired any growth in consumption and reduced demand that normally drives expansion. These make it harder for businesses to attract capital for both expansion and also as bridge to get through difficult times. New lending regulations have made borrowing for small and medium-sized businesses more difficult since lenders want to see more equity in the borrowers personal property. If a business has provided professional services to the Federal government, they've had to deal with sequester and reduced use of outside contracting. And the real estate sector faces high and persistent vacancies in both office and retail space, as well as a trend that shows tenants often shrinking their footprint at lease renewal, as the average amount of office space per worker has shrunk from about 250 sq ft/worker to 160 sq ft in the private sector and closer to 100 sq ft per worker in the government and non-profit center. So businesses are shrinking their footprints when possible which is good for them, because it reduces operating costs, but bad for building owners because it increases vacancies. The retail real estate sector faces the challenge of empty store fronts which, besides the reduced rents, send a bad signal to prospective tenants. These are severe challenges. For businesses that

have to interface with the County, they face challenges in the regulatory process and conflicting demands, at times, from different agencies. I think the Executive, and particularly Diane Schwartz-Jones at DPS, are working to simplify the regulatory review process and re-examine fee structures. I feel we've made progress, I've heard more positive comments about those reforms, but there is more to do.

What do you believe are the core responsibilities of the position you seek and what will you do to carry these out?

Our future depends on strong communities with good schools, parks, recreation facilities, and libraries – the “quality of life” things that make people want to live and work here. As a member of the County Council my goal has been to promote policies that continue to offer real opportunities for an increasingly diverse population, including housing and job opportunities, libraries and recreation programs, an improved transit system, a robust social services safety net, and a strong economic base to support these. I have to help create policies that protect the quality of life in the County which is greatest of attractor of residents and businesses to the County. I have to, to the extent possible, evaluate the performance of government in light of the objectives we have set with an eye to insuring that we deliver services efficiently and effectively. So I pay a lot of attention to detail and rely heavily on data to influence my decision-making. I ask a lot of questions and I demand accountability. I look closely at the cost of what we do, and I've supported consolidation of government services where possible. I've been on the losing end of supporting several of the Executive's proposals to streamline County government operations. We also do direct constituent services, though to a lesser extent than District Council members, but we do get requests and I've been able to help both businesses and residents on numerous occasions. I also meet with anybody. I listen to lots of perspectives and believe that I can learn from my conversations with different people in the community.

Please explain your budget priorities and describe your approach to the role you will play in impacting the County/State budget.

We need to focus on Montgomery County Public Schools, restore cuts made in previous years to libraries and recreation programs, expand the transit system, and maintain support for our public safety departments and social service safety net. Councilmembers are currently working their way, collaboratively, through the FY2015 budget, restoring cuts made in previous years to the extent possible. We need to continue to look for ways to reorganize County government to produce long-term savings. And we need to work with our State representatives to bring home a fairer share of State dollars to meet our infrastructure and program needs.

What improvements do you believe are needed to the transportation infrastructure In Montgomery County and Maryland? Please list them in your priority order.

The Purple Line is a given, assuming the Federal government puts up the money we need. After that it would be the bus rapid transit network with the priorities being the CCT, the 355 line up to the Germantown Montgomery College Campus, Georgia Ave. from Olney to Wheaton, and the Rte 29 line from Burtonsville to Silver Spring. These serve the major north--south corridors and are critical to support planned development in Life Sciences, White Flint and White Oak/FDA. The Randolph Rd line and Viers Mill RD/University BLVD provide important cross county connections. There are some critical road projects, including the Watkins Mill interchange and the Rte 28 and Georgia Ave intersection and related improvements along Rte 28, that are important. Overall, it's the provision of transit that is badly needed for the locations where we are placing the greatest development possibilities.

If elected, how do you plan to address the perception and reality of Montgomery County and Maryland having a less competitive business climate?

I supported the creation of the Montgomery Business Development Corporation, which plays an important role in advising and counseling us. It has already made improvements by providing the kind of information businesses need to make a decision to locate here. And, while regulation is necessary, we could make changes in the permitting process to speed approvals and eliminate duplicate inspections and reviews. We should eliminate regulations which provide no benefits, don't make us safe, or don't protect the environment or communities.

How do you define economic development?

Activities that support the creation and sustainability of economic activity and which creates new and decent paying jobs. In a County like ours with high vacancy rates and over 10 million square feet of vacant commercial space, the challenge is not the approval of new buildings, but the attraction of new companies and the expansion of existing ones that will occupy the space that is idle. The amount of vacant space we have could support between 40,000 and 60,000 jobs.

What role should government play to help attract, grow and retain business?

We need to focus on maintaining the quality of life that attracts businesses and their workers. We need to do more to encourage small and local businesses – this can be done through zoning and land use decisions and through economic development initiatives. I strongly support local preference legislation that would give local business preference in providing goods and services to the County. We also need to be more careful with our zoning decisions because we've made decisions that will actually wipe out existing small businesses.

What current economic development initiatives do you support?

The PHED Committee reviews proposals by the Department of Economic Development. We must be strategic in how we spend our limited economic development funds, but I support development programs to attract high-quality businesses to the County. I also think we can do more to aid small businesses and to do more in educating would-be entrepreneurs. Our incubators are not as strong as they should be and we should look at some of the other models around the country. Incubators have to be more than cheap real estate, and I welcome the proposal by the Executive to re-examine the issue of bio-tech incubators in order to find a better model and put it in place. I think the BRT transit proposals are critical to economic development - Shady Grove Life Sciences, White Flint and White Oak/FDA will never reach their potential if we do not provide the transit infrastructure.

What new economic development initiatives would you propose?

I am willing to consider tax incentives or abatements to keep struggling businesses alive and spur new ones to open. I also support higher density commercial development around Metro locations, and we need to increase the availability of smaller commercial spaces to provide more opportunities for business smaller than 5,000 square feet. Plus the on-going reform of DPS and Planning procedures.

Please use this opportunity to provide any other information you would like MCCC members to know.

Time and again, I have demonstrated my commitment to finding ways to make local government work better, more efficiently, and more effectively for county residents and businesses. I have shown leadership on important issues and have an open-door policy – I welcome meetings with anyone who has a stake in and a message about improving the quality of life in the County. I listened to the development community when they raised the issue of duplicative fire inspections on new construction and the last minute addition of new requirements, I took it to the Executive, and they changed the procedure, as just one example of my willingness to take the concerns of the business community seriously.