

# Frederick County Executive and Council Questionnaire 2018

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**Please complete the questionnaire as soon as possible. Although this document will not be shared outside of the confidential endorsement process, Sierra Club and Clean Water Action reserve the right to make public specific portions of this document, should a candidate's stated position directly contradict submitted answers, during the campaign or after taking office.**

## General

1. Please describe which environmental issues are most important to you and why. How would you address them if you are elected?

One of the biggest responsibilities of the County Council is our role in land use decisions. Through this lens, I believe Frederick County needs to focus on smart growth. The draft Livable Frederick plan with its long-term, vision-based approach is a step on the right direction.

We should make growth decisions using the EPA Smart Growth Network principles that were developed by looking at the experiences and successes of communities around the nation that have used smart growth approaches to create and maintain great neighborhoods. The principles are as follows:

- 1) Mix land uses
- 2) Take advantage of compact building design
- 3) Create a range of housing opportunities and choices
- 4) Create walkable neighborhoods
- 5) Foster distinctive, attractive communities with a strong sense of place
- 6) Preserve open space, farmland, natural beauty, and critical environmental areas
- 7) Strengthen and direct development towards existing communities
- 8) Provide a variety of transportation choices
- 9) Make development decisions predictable, fair, and cost effective
- 10) Encourage community and stakeholder collaboration in development decisions

This is not an isolated set of policies, but rather an approach to growth that directly and substantially overlaps with other important issues such as economically efficient services, affordable housing, and appropriate school construction.

Frederick County can work with its municipalities to look at revitalization downtown areas and rundown commercial areas as potential growth sites. Revitalization of these areas can help prevent suburban sprawl. These are opportunities that are recognized in the draft Livable Frederick plan.

2. List any past energy or environmental initiatives you have promoted.

I have had the opportunity to work on environmental legislative initiatives throughout my term. I worked closely with my colleague Council Member Keegan-Ayer to pass a bill concerning Solar Facilities and Floating Zones. I also worked with Council Member Jerry Donald to pass a bill that widened the requirements for waterbody buffers. When it became clear that the County Executive's bill to amend our Forest Resource Ordinance would not pass, I worked with stakeholder groups, including representatives from the Sierra Club and Potomac Conservancy, to find consensus on ways to strengthen the ordinance, even though it would not go as far as we would have liked. I also supported budgets that have invested in more electric buses for our TRANSIT fleet and increased funding to our Office of Sustainability.

### **Climate Change**

1. Please list your specific ideas on how to make Frederick County a leader in the state with regard to climate change initiatives and adaptation.

While Frederick County has embarked on several climate change initiatives and sustainability measures, like the formation of the Office of Environmental Sustainability and the Green Homes Challenge program, we have far more work to do to make Frederick County a leader.

I will work towards making Frederick County a home to the budding solar industry. While our bill to create a solar floating zone was a step in the right direction, there is still much more we can do to support solar in Frederick County. I look towards our fellow counties in Maryland like Baltimore and Harford County who have signaled their receptiveness towards the renewable energy industry through tax credits and various incentives. I believe that this is a path that could benefit the residents of Frederick County while also working towards the universal goal of reducing greenhouse gases.

Smart growth is a climate change policy. Walkable communities and public transit are climate change solutions. The County is currently going through a process to update our Comprehensive Plan, titled Livable Frederick. I fully support this vision-based approach to planning that will plan growth near existing infrastructure, take advantage of current transportation opportunities and expand them, and conserve our green spaces and agricultural lands. The plan is still in draft form, but I believe it will take us in the right direction in terms of smart growth.

Recycling, composting, and other waste reduction efforts are climate change policies. I support the recommendations in the "What's Next" Solid Waste report that suggest composting pilot programs as well as an upcoming bill from the County Executive that will allow composting on farm land.

2. What can Frederick County do to address the developing "climate emergency"?

Local governments that are not making climate change initiatives central to their planning, decision-making, and vision for the future are not only adding to the global problem, but causing serious damage to our communities. The County Council must work with the County Executive to ensure that decisions being made throughout all of our departments are made through the lens of climate change. One of the four big themes of

the draft Livable Frederick plan is the environment. This document, once approved, will ultimately drive many decisions by County leaders.

## **Energy**

1. Name specific ways that the county can most quickly and equitably convert to 100% renewable energy, becoming coal-free as a first step.

In order to reach 100% renewable energy, we should develop incentive packages for local residents, organizations, and businesses to invest in renewable energy projects. Better incentivizing solar projects, building County solar on brownfields, such as the landfill, and continuing to educate our citizens about local, state, and federal programs will also be key. As the state works to increase residential incentives on the state level, I would like to investigate the option of property tax credits to homeowners who invest in residential clean energy projects. Counties such as Baltimore and Anne Arundel have already initiated such incentives.

2. What specific ideas do you have for bringing clean energy jobs to Frederick County?

After the recent hit to the solar industry from the federal government in the form of international tariffs, the solar industry is in desperate need of investing incentives. The County already has a New Jobs tax credit and during my term we approved a new Small Business tax credit and a Commercial and Industrial tax credit focused on manufacturing. These incentives coupled with a focus on the solar industry could help bring more clean energy jobs to Frederick County.

## **Solid Waste**

1. What are your ideas to reduce solid waste generated and handled within the county? What pilot programs, including composting, should be put in place from the Solid Waste Management Study?

Food waste is a huge part of our solid waste problem and there are proven ways to reduce the amount of food waste in our waste stream. The County should move forward with source separated organics (SSO) composting in a decentralized manner as recommended in the recent Solid Waste Management Study. Based on the study's extensive research and modeling, this would be the most cost-effective (small portions of the County at a time, starting with one pilot program rather than building a large resource recovery park or centrally located composting facility) and has the potential for the most buy-in. If it is financially viable for the County, I would also like to see us expand single-stream collection to multi-family units and non-residential properties.

2. How would you reduce or eliminate litter such as styrofoam and plastic beverage containers (which make up about half of trash collected along waterways during community clean-ups, and only about a fourth of which are recycled)?

I applaud elected leaders on the state level who are working to reduce waste by phasing out styrofoam as a product used for packaging in food service industries. While this policy is being considered, I believe that it is important for counties and municipalities to do their best to educate residents on what materials are recyclable and make these practices convenient, accessible, and simple. This means regular and reliable recycling pick-ups, bins in public places, and education materials available to tell residents what is recyclable. I am also open to looking at local measures to reduce or eliminate the use of styrofoam packaging, however I know that this may be an uphill battle.

3. How can Frederick County reduce or eliminate toxic emissions from the landfill or the nearby Dickerson incinerator?

The Frederick County landfill includes a methane gas-to-energy facility that converts landfill gas to electricity that can be utilized in the local electrical grid. Our Department of Solid Waste Management utilizes best practices when capturing methane gas. This is something that we can re-evaluate to see if we are operating this program at maximum capacity. We can also continue our efforts in educating the community about recycling and composting opportunities as well as waste reduction education.

During my 2014 campaign, I was vocal and adamant on opposition to the proposed waste-to-energy incinerator. I believe this is not an economically or environmentally viable solution to our waste problem. I do not support any kind of partnership with the Dickerson incinerator.

## **Water**

1. What can Frederick County do to lessen agricultural runoff into our rivers and tributaries? Include ideas for the make-up and conduct of the Monocacy River Board as well as ideas on ways to bridge the gap between landowners and conservationists on the river plan.

As part of the Chesapeake watershed and a community built around agriculture, Frederick must work to find a balance between the needs of landowners and farmers with the goals of conservationists and the health of our waterways. We can work harder to educate farmers and landowners with property adjacent to our waterways about local, state, and federal programs such as Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) and other ag preservation programs. We can also develop local incentives for farmers who use best practices in nutrient and sediment reduction.

The Monocacy Scenic River Citizens Advisory Board has gone through a lengthy public process to update the Monocacy Scenic River Plan. The Council recently held a public hearing on the draft plan and has heard many comments both for and against. Because this Board includes representation from both Frederick and Carroll Counties, the makeup of the board is not completely under our control. There have also been many changes in the board membership from when they started revising the plan to the present day. This has led to rifts among the membership and confusion about the intent of the plan. Ultimately, we want a plan that people will support and use to guide decisions in the future that will protect the Monocacy River, not a “red herring” on property rights that distracts us from the goal of protecting one of our most precious local resources. I am still actively reading, processing, and asking questions of staff on the plan to help me determine the best way forward.

2. How can the problem of nitrogen entering our groundwater via septic systems be addressed?

Frederick County continues to evaluate new and resubmitted permit applications for septic systems on a case by case basis to ensure that best available nitrogen reduction technology (BAT) is used, especially in critical areas. State law changed in 2016 to relieve many septic systems of this requirement, however our Department of Environmental Health and Health Dept. can still require the installation of a BAT on sites where a BAT is necessary to protect the water supply or water resources of the state, designated Wellhead Protection areas, the lot has poor soils for on-site sewage disposal, and/or the wastewater strength is greater than typical domestic strength.

## **Forests**

1. How can the terms of the County Executive's Forest Resource Ordinance bill (#17-17), or Council President Otis' Alterations to the FRO bill (#17-20) be amended or expanded to protect and increase the Frederick County forests?

When it became clear that the County Executive's bill to amend our Forest Resource Ordinance would not pass, I worked with stakeholder groups, including representatives from the Sierra Club and Potomac Conservancy, to find consensus on ways to strengthen the ordinance, even though it would not go as far as we would have liked. I worked closely with the stakeholders in this discussion, including farmers, developers, environmentalists, and business owners, to come up with amendments to the County Executive's bill.

The amended bill, which passed recently, strengthens the forest mitigation banking program, reduces allowable miscellaneous credits to 25%, and provides administrative clarity to portions of the FRO program. While this did not improve the FRO as much as I would have liked, I would rather see us take small steps forward than no steps forward. It is my hope that we will eventually be able to make additional progress regarding the afforestation and reforestation thresholds in the FRO program.

## **Air Quality and Greenhouse Gases**

1. What specific ideas do you have to improve air quality in Frederick County? Include suggestions for reducing emissions from transportation within the county, as well as your ideas for improving mass transit.

The County must maintain our current public transportation options and look for opportunities to expand. The draft Livable Frederick plan recognizes the importance of public transportation and envisions a more connected County with increased TransIT options. We have increased our number of electric buses in the fleet and plan to continue down that path. Tied to the effort to increase public transportation is planning growth in a way that complements our existing and growing public transportation options. That means using smart growth principles, developing walkable communities, and building mixed use development that support economically viable public transit options.

With approximately 40% of Frederick County residents commuting out of the county each day, public transportation for commuter services should be a specific focus area. We have already made the investment to bring MARC commuter rail service to Frederick, but we need to investigate express service that will shorten commuting time to D.C., advertise MARC service more effectively, and have an ongoing dialogue with commuters to improve the service and build more significant ridership. I would also like to look into whether expanding Meet-the-MARC shuttle bus service to cover more areas of the county might help build MARC ridership.

The MTA bus service to Shady Grove is very popular, and we should investigate its expansion, both to Shady Grove and possibly other locations in the metropolitan area that might warrant service.

## **Agriculture**

1. Given Frederick County's rich history of agriculture and citizens' desire to continue this, what ideas do you have to help our farmers thrive and operate more sustainably in the future?

Although the Maryland Farm Bureau works with farmers to advocate to their state and local governments on issues that impact their businesses, I believe that the county government, in conjunction with the state government, should be making efforts to create regulatory guides for small businesses and farmers to make compliance simpler and more accessible. We can also develop local incentives for farmers who use best practices in nutrient and sediment reduction. Our Frederick County Agricultural Business Council and our Agriculture Business Development Specialist (a new position that was added during our term) help educate farmers on best practices.

2. How can existing agricultural operations be moved towards more organic practices in order to increase carbon sequestration?

Soil from organic farms has a higher potential for long-term carbon storage than soil on conventional farms. The USDA Farm Agency has several programs, including low-interest, long-term conservation loans, that can help farmers transition to organic agricultural practices. Our Agriculture Business Development Specialist can work to educate local farmers on these programs and provide assistance as necessary. The state has an Organic Agriculture and Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) that we can encourage our local farmers to explore. We can also highlight organic farms in our Homegrown Frederick marketing.

## **Education**

1. In a November poll of likely general election voters, education and schools were the highest priority issue. What ideas do you have for educating Frederick County youth to be better prepared for mitigating and adapting to our warming climate?

Frederick's youth will be the driving force of change for environmental sustainability and that will begin with educating them on the effects of climate change. As a teacher, I know how important it is to create lifelong learners during their formative years of development. By investing in our schools and creating students who are problem-solvers and critical thinkers, I believe we will be investing in the environment and the future solutions to climate change. Getting as close to full funding of the BOE budget as possible will ensure reasonable class sizes and more course offerings at the secondary level, including in environmental literacy, science, agriculture, and technology. Helping students take ownership of their own learning and actions will also help. Students and schools that have initiated programs like community gardens, food waste composting, and improved recycling efforts, are a great model. FCPS could look to make these more systemic initiatives rather than piecemeal efforts.