

**The following eight candidates responded to two questions sent to all Board of County Commissioner candidates from the MacRo Report Blog. Responses were limited to 250 words maximum and were due by September 5, 2010.**

**Linda Norris - D**

*1. Frederick County's assessable tax base decreased in the last fiscal year by 6%. Assuming this may become a trend that continues for another 3 to 4 years, what specific measures with county spending and programs (including the allocation to the Board of Education) would you take as a County Commissioner to avoid increasing real estate property taxes on county property owners?*

On the expense side, my feeling since I first filed was to emphasize a "needs not wants" approach until the foreclosures stop, the assessable base again levels and rises and state contributions return to levels that we had in 2006. This will require a very energetic and exhaustive level of dialogue with county staff and Board of Education staff to drill down to potential areas of efficiencies and savings.

1. An efficiency committee with school board and county board of commissioner members has meet intermittently (apparently not recently according to Katie Groth) about issues like this. This committee needs to be formalized until the above occurs, and include staff of the county and board of education as well as several citizen members to give it the transparency for which our citizens are yearning. The meetings should be public and regularly scheduled. Areas of duplication and opportunity for volume should be the focus for savings, and best practices from both sides of the budget need to be sought.

2. Self Funded Health Insurance. The last time this was formally bid out was five years ago (it has only been updated by the county's consultant in the interim) This committee could focus on areas of duplication between the two government agencies, and areas where work could be done together, such as assisting the County Government to step up to Self Insured Health Insurance, which private sector companies have found could save millions in fees. While risk is an understandable obstacle, working to align the county's bid time as soon as feasibly possible with the BoE, which in the past 2 years has achieved successful management of this program, could help the county afford/manage the risk.

3. Head Start. Frederick County is the only county, according to the county Budget Office, to run Head Start; most others are run by non-profits/ public-private partnerships. This should be studied

immediately for potential savings.

4. Citizens/Montevue Nursing Home. Similarly, our county appears to be the only one to run these under county auspices. Privatization of these institutions should be studied for a potential \$2 million + in savings.

5. The Board of Education should be urged to look at the APQC North Star benchmarking program, which has found millions of dollars in savings in process-oriented restructuring of school programs in Montgomery County, Nevada and other school districts.

<http://www.getideas.org/library/casestudies/following-north-star-apqc> Any reductions in Maintenance of Effort (waivers) should only be considered after the Board of Ed and Commissioners agree TOGETHER that every other attempt at efficiency has been exhausted.

On the Revenue side, the county should work vigorously with our delegates and senators, as well as MACO, to fight for highway user fund revenue and all other programs that are being "raided" from county use. Commissioners and our Annapolis representatives need to well understand each others' issues and the residents' pain points at each level to effectively serve the county.

2. *What specific ideas do you have to improve the Board of County Commissioners' working relationship with the 12 municipalities within Frederick County, and how would that benefit county taxpayers?"*

Municipal elected officials are "closest" to the citizens, and they are valuable allies and resources for county commissioners and county staff when countywide policy changes and programs are put into place. Like any business network, relationships with these officials need to be regularly cultivated. A closer relationship should be nurtured by working hard to find a regular meeting structure that includes county staff presentations, social networking time, and a "neutral" meeting location/time, similar to the Frederick COG meetings that used to occur at Bettys and the American Legion. These may seem like overly simple suggestions, but relationships must be productive in order for innovation and cooperation to occur. It would also be advisable for each commissioner to "liaise" or specialize in several of the towns, meaning that periodically they should be attending town meetings or interfacing with town

officials in some other way. Fort Detrick should be included as a "municipality" as well to increase the information available and develop the relationship with Fort officials further.

**Michael Kurtianyk - D**

1. *Frederick County's assessable tax base decreased in the last fiscal year by 6%. Assuming this may become a trend that continues for another 3 to 4 years, what specific measures with county spending*

*and programs (including the allocation to the Board of Education) would you take as a County Commissioner to avoid increasing real estate property taxes on county property owners?*

As County Commissioner, I would transfer my skills as a small business owner to the county. As every business owner knows, there are three ways to approach a budget: reduce expenses, raise revenues, or both.

My first step would be to work with the Division Directors, and the County Manager, to begin a zero-based budget approach. Then, I would work with the Board of Education on the possibility of reducing the Maintenance of Effort funding. Next, I would reduce redundancy and waste on every line item of the budget.

Throughout this process, my attitude will be: "Everything is on the table, and up for discussion."

We must focus on economic development to get us out from the budget deficit we'll be facing the next few years. Also, we must divide our programs in things we "must have"; things we "should have"; and things we would "like to have".

2. *What specific ideas do you have to improve the Board of County Commissioners' working relationship with the 12 municipalities within Frederick County, and how would that benefit county taxpayers?"*

Relations have become so strained that seven of the twelve municipalities requested a judicial review challenging a new county ordinance regarding development restrictions related to school capacity on newly annexed properties. The municipalities are objecting because the new regulation interferes with the rights of towns and cities to determine their own growth policies.

The first thing we need to do is sit down in good faith with representatives from each of the municipalities so as to start fresh, and not be adversarial. Let's figure out a plan that deals with everything head on: municipal growth; fire and rescue services; and tax differential.

Soon after being elected to the Board of County Commissioners, I will make a motion to form a committee to draft a charter form of government. I hope to have the support of two other commissioners for this important issue. The change to a charter form of government will allow Frederick County to speak with one voice to Annapolis, our municipalities, and other governing bodies, like the Board of Education. The Charter form of government allows for a more complete representation of the citizens of Frederick County.

I would request that this be on the ballot in 2012, an "off-year" in local politics, and a presidential election nationally, so that the citizens of this county can focus just on this issue.

If successful, we would then have the ability to separate the executive from the legislative branches of government, with a council representing the municipalities in our county.

Furthermore, and again, if successful, we would then proceed with zeroing in on combining city and county services, if we haven't started it already.

#### **Ralph Whitmore - D**

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The very first thing that must be done is to impress upon our county employees that they do not need to spend every dime budgeted to them. If we allocate money to a specific project and it is not spent, it should be returned to the "rainy day fund." That being said, this surplus money should not then be spent frivolously. Second, we need to completely analyze all job positions at the county level (including the Board of Education) to determine their worthiness. Jobs that are outdated or overlapping do not need to be continually filled. When county employees retire we need to scrutinize these positions to see

if job can be combined before we immediately hire someone to fill the position. We will need to change the mindset of our employees- it should not be about how much we can spend, but how much we can save. There is talk of outsourcing some positions. This is another item that must be analyzed closely. Some jobs can be completely more efficiently in the private sector. Last, and certainly least, would be the decision to offer salary reductions to all county employees (including Commissioners) rather than layoffs.

2. *What specific ideas do you have to improve the Board of County Commissioners' working relationship with the 12 municipalities within Frederick County, and how would that benefit county taxpayers?"*

We need to tone down the rhetoric. At times, municipal leaders have been treated very poorly by our County Commissioners. However, our municipal leaders must understand that development approved by their residents still relies upon the county government to provide schools. For too long, certain municipal leaders have claimed they have nothing to do with schools. However, this is not true. Municipal leaders often place the county government in a tight situation when they approve development in areas where schools are already severely overcrowded. Recently, Frederick City's Northern annexation has caused a lot of trouble between the county and its' municipalities. The City and the County should have worked harder to settle their differences in a pleasant way. Arguing among the two gained them nothing. The other concern is that there is a general lack of funds. The county, instead of mandating that municipalities will receive "this much money," Should have invited municipalities to work together to solve their problems. It would have been more efficient and cost effective in this manner. As the Burgess of Walkersville, I have had as many differences with the county as much as any other municipal leader, for example, the library location, the fire tax, zoning around the town, and etc. At times, they have made me madder than a "wet setting hen." However, through the course of all these situations, we have managed to be amicable in our personal relations. A little give and take does not hurt a bit.

**Elaine Kessinger - R**

1. *Frederick County's assessable tax base decreased in the last fiscal year by 6%. Assuming this may become a trend that continues for another 3 to 4 years, what specific measures with county spending and programs (including the allocation to the Board of Education) would you take as a County Commissioner to avoid increasing real estate property taxes on county property owners?*

Some argue that taxes levied by the school board's expenditures have a negative effect on the stability of our economy. Others argue that the school board is a stable economic factor. I've always proposed that there should be more State accountability of education funding and how it has been distributed – where are the tax dollars really being spent? The severity of these economic times calls for new measures to figure out anticipated school expenditures and what effect they will really have upon satisfying needs should the economic environment degrade for years. If more attention is not assigned to reduce school spending, emergency cuts will have to be applied to other public services, or even extending or contracting credit, and unfortunately, increasing taxes. State officials must halt the unrealistic spending patterns, and create a new culture that will efficiently govern its practices. State policies must be established that address ways to reduce the severity of a degrading economy while at the same time finding ways to expand the economy. State officials can then be more effective in describing unnecessary programs and projects that are particularly unacceptable in turbulent times, and enact appropriate changes to legislation in line with new economic realities. New trends in economic forces that affect expenditures must be explored, and should not be limited to a year-by-year basis. We must eliminate inefficiencies.

2. *What specific ideas do you have to improve the Board of County Commissioners' working relationship with the 12 municipalities within Frederick County, and how would that benefit county taxpayers?"*

This is a growing issue in that the county seriously needs to improve the relationship it has with the local municipalities. Discussing municipality issues with citizens, a recurring theme pertains that worries are common and that the government really does not care about the municipalities. There is growing concern that the municipalities are growing angry about things that may or may not happen, that the municipalities shouldn't have to worry about asking for what they need or reasonably want. The government needs to include the municipal leaders and its citizens building-trusting relationships instead of emotionally charged incorrect or even hidden assumptions that will only cause further unrest between the board of commissioners and the respective municipalities.

### **C. Paul Smith - R**

*1. Frederick County's assessable tax base decreased in the last fiscal year by 6%. Assuming this may become a trend that continues for another 3 to 4 years, what specific measures with county spending and programs (including the allocation to the Board of Education) would you take as a County Commissioner to avoid increasing real estate property taxes on county property owners?*

The County must continue to increase efficiency and cut costs in the BOE and all county programs. But loss of jobs is the primary cause of the county budget crisis. Bringing new jobs and promoting commerce in the county will fix it. Raising taxes is not an option. The County needs to take the following immediate actions: 1) Revise/streamline its permitting processes so that building projects can go forward immediately. Failure to do this will encourage needed businesses and commerce to go elsewhere. Making immediate changes will hasten the monetary relief that will come through such new development. 2) Facilitate (rather than block) the prompt allocation of sewer service to the Homewood senior housing development on Willow Road. There is a waiting list of 400 people for this housing, which will bring in needed revenues without having any impact on schools. 3) Facilitate, rather than block the job development that Frederick City is proposing for the north part of Frederick City, close to Ft. Detrick. This is a prime location for premier employment centers. Its proximity to Ft. Detrick and to water, sewer, roads and electricity infrastructure make it the ideal location for major job locations. By supporting this, the County will promote the job growth that will provide short-term and long-term revenues to the County.

During the past two years the county has lost over 3,000 jobs. Hundreds of vacant houses cause property values to go down. Increased jobs will put people in houses and raise property values.

*2. What specific ideas do you have to improve the Board of County Commissioners' working relationship with the 12 municipalities within Frederick County, and how would that benefit county taxpayers?"*

The County needs a new Board, with attitudes and philosophies that appreciate and recognize the importance of the municipal governments, giving them significant autonomy over their own plans and development. The County must allow for differences in municipal APFOs. Each municipality has different circumstances and issues. The County must allow for different solutions and approaches in each city. Only if a municipal action would cause serious and significant adverse effects on areas outside city boundaries should the County interfere. The County attempt to invalidate municipal APFOs

is a mistake. The BOCC's overt efforts to overturn Frederick City annexations is a serious threat to every municipality. The Frederick City annexations were totally consistent with previous City and County plans. The County changed its mind and opposed land uses that it had previously approved. This type of inconsistency will always cause problems with municipalities, who have a right to count on the County to be consistent. In the recently passed County Comprehensive Plan, the BOCC took action to supersede the growth boundaries of almost all municipalities. This action is a direct attack on municipal powers and plans. This action is offensive because the County calls for the cities to double their density (in handling projected residential growth), and then the County cuts back the areas where the cities had planned for growth.

Effective local government is best for citizen involvement and efficiency. Promoting good municipal government will promote fiscal efficiency.

#### **Al Imhoff - R**

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With the third major round of foreclosures now in full swing, the 3-4 year projection may be somewhat optimistic when added to the continuing issues with unemployment trends. Coupling that with the potential effects of the "down zoning" of parcels under the recently adopted Comprehensive Plan the County will need to focus on attracting new jobs out of the projected Washington Metropolitan forecast. (See **Region Forward**, adopted by the Washington Area Council of Governments -WASHCOG). By showcasing our existing healthy commercial, flex-space, and office opportunities the County's Office of Economic Development should receive unflinching support from the next board of commissioners. When couple with our first-rate Workforce Services office I believe we can stabilize the assessable base and provide for marginal gains as the overall economy recovers. That is the stabilization on the revenue side.

For the expense side of the budget, when elected I would be taking a very close look at the number of Full Time Equivalent (FTE) positions throughout all departments. From FY01 to FY09 FTE's increased by 758 or a 44.1% increase while the population only grew by 14.5% We went from 8.4 FTE per 1,000

residents to 10.6 FTE. Over the next 5 years, if we could set a goal to reduce the FTE per 1,000 residents back to 1999 levels when it was 7.4, this could go a long way to bring “balance” back to the budget.

2. *What specific ideas do you have to improve the Board of County Commissioners' working relationship with the 12 municipalities within Frederick County, and how would that benefit county taxpayers?"*

As Alderman for the City of Frederick I had the honor to serve four years with my peers in the local chapter of the Maryland Municipal League and last year was chosen by them as President. I worked on the committee for resolving the Tax Equity issue, heard the concerns raised by the volunteer fire and rescue personnel and the on-going issues surrounding comprehensive planning, zoning and annexations. I have had recent experience in addressing those issues and can readily bring that experience to the table when elected. We need to get away from the “us versus them” that has evolved over the past decade and recognize we are all in this together, especially when working on the comprehensive plans for the respective jurisdictions. Government agencies, property owners and business need to have a clear understanding of where requirements are and where there are going to be in order to make informed decisions. If as government officials we cannot provide that, then we will only continue as we have been. Major infrastructure planning must be done with 50-year horizons and a willingness to stick to the plan.

Another area of benefit would be to utilize the resources from WASHCOG in addition to MML and MaCO to pool or share resources between the jurisdictions. It has already begun, but can be expanded. Perhaps ways to reduce duplication of services can be found for economies of scale, like we already do for certain types of purchases.

**Blaine Young - R**

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My primary focus during this campaign and during my brief time as an appointed member of the BOCC has been the wasteful spending by the current board and its predecessors. When times were good they

spent every nickel they could get their hands on. And when times got tough, they wanted pats on the back for cutting back bloated programs that they had created and over funded themselves.

Anything that we spend money on as a county that is not related to an essential service (education, public safety, roads, fire and rescue water and sewer) should be on the table for examination and possible cutbacks. The Board of Education needs to cut the fat in its administrative offices and learn to live with less money by focusing available funds directly on teachers and classroom education. I will do everything I can to ensure that the Board of County Commissioners does not continue to treat county property owners and taxpayers as an unlimited source of funds, and that the government manages its budget the same way a family manages theirs. In tough times, we must cut back. You are not an ATM.

2. *What specific ideas do you have to improve the Board of County Commissioners' working relationship with the 12 municipalities within Frederick County, and how would that benefit county taxpayers?"*

I have come out in favor of changing the current system of "tax equity" payments to one of "tax differential" in property tax rates. Under my proposal, taxpayers in municipalities would pay a lower tax rate to the county. This would help offset the cost of municipal taxes, and would reflect the fact that the municipalities provide many of the services which county taxes are designed to support.

I would also recognize that there are certain matters that are inherently within the jurisdiction of the municipality, and I would discontinue the current practice of this Board of County Commissioners lecturing municipalities on how to conduct their affairs. Municipal leaders are elected for a purpose, which is to govern the municipality. County leaders are elected to run the county. I would encourage all of us to work together rather than at cross purposes, which seems to be the case today. Since appointed I have attended one meeting of every municipality except Myersville which I will do so in the next 30 days.

#### **Kirby Delauter - R**

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With Property Tax revenues for 2010 at \$251,000,000 a 6% decrease annually would equate to \$15,000,000. Over a 4 year period the next BoCC will need to cut spending by \$60,000,000. If we start

with the largest expenditures, the first would be the BoE at \$229,000,000. A 10% cut in the overall budget (minus Maint / Operations) would net \$18,000,000. The majority of that should come from wages over \$100,000 in the administrative and Mid – Level Administration, this would net \$4,000,000. The BoE Operations / Maintenance Departments ( \$46,000,000 combined ) should be dissolved and these services outsourced on an as- needed basis. Best estimate for cost savings would be \$35,000,000. The County Attorney’s office could be cut by 50% saving \$450,000, and use outsourcing as well. The Risk Management Department should be dissolved and this function outsourced to Private Carriers saving approximately at net of \$150,000. Building Maintenance should be dissolved and outsourced saving Apprx. \$2,000,000. Permitting and Development Review should be downsized and outsourced, except for 2 Administrative Positions and 2 Clerks saving \$6,000,000. The Office of the Fire Marshall should be dissolved and outsourced to the State, saving \$535,000. Public Works, the majority could be outsourced on an as needed basis, savings of \$7,000,000 minimum. Parks and Rec, again, the majority can be outsourced saving \$3,000,000 minimum. We do not have a revenue problem, we have a spending problem, just in these examples there is approximately \$77,000,000 annually that could possible be reduced. Closer evaluation is needed, but I feel it is not out of the realm of possibility to achieve this. These are based on 2010 budget numbers.

2. *What specific ideas do you have to improve the Board of County Commissioners' working relationship with the 12 municipalities within Frederick County, and how would that benefit county taxpayers?"*

The majority of working with anyone is having a vested interest in what’s best for everyone involved. The County should take into consideration the interest of the Municipalities and what their goals are. We could start by revising the recently adopted Comp Plan, specifically the down zoning to allow property owners and Municipalities to weigh in with their input. If any Municipality or private property owner would like a revised review of their specific property / annexation request, they should be afforded that opportunity.

The BoCC could also improve relations with Municipalities on the Fire / Rescue tax. Municipalities with a higher volunteer base could possibly get a prorated share of their tax (equity) back proportionate to the services provided. The County could also not nickel / dime Municipalities for items such as mailing of tax bills. The majority of open debate is just simply listening to the needs of the Municipalities and providing support from the County level wherever possible.