



2014 County Council Candidate Questionnaire

Please return completed questionnaire to Barbara Hueter at bhueter@mceanea.org.

Name: HANS RIEMER

Council District: At-Large

Address: 7701 Takoma Ave., Takoma Park, MD, 20912

Phone number(s): 240-389-4267 campaign 301-938-6899 personal cell

Email: hans.riemer@gmail.com

Website: hansriemer.com

Children

	<u>Name</u>	<u>Age</u>	<u>School</u>
1.	Henry Riemer	6	Takoma Park Elementary School
2.	Travis Riemer	3	

Education and Training

BA, Politics (Honors), UC Santa Cruz, 1995

Employment:

Occupation: County Council Member

Employer: Montgomery County

Address: 100 Maryland Ave., Rockville, MD 20850

General Responsibilities of Position: Authoring and voting on legislation, deciding budgets, deciding land use, constituent service, advocating for the interests of the county and its residents.

Union Membership (past or present):

I confirm that the responses provided here are my official positions in seeking county office and I understand that MCEA reserves the right to share my responses with members and interested parties.

CANDIDATE SIGNATURE: *Hans Riemer*

DATE: 3/20/14

1. Over the past four years, how have you been an advocate for public education?

The past four years have been more difficult than I could have ever imagined, but I believe we are back on a sustainable path and I am optimistic about the future.

MCEA sets the right tone with its collaborative approach to education policy and politics, and I have sought to reciprocate that leadership style because I believe it works best for our county. I have met with the leadership regularly and I have strived to strengthen my dialogue with our educators in order to lay the foundation for better times ahead.

I have voted in favor of allocating money equivalent to the Superintendent's operating budget request over the last two years. I supported local funding for school construction of \$229.4 million last year, which according to MCPS is a record amount. I support the Executive's plan to spend an additional \$129 million of local funds on school construction over the next CIP, which will be a new record. I support state legislation to delay the use of testing on Common Core standards in teacher evaluations. And I voted for record funding for Montgomery College, which totals \$280 million in the current fiscal year.

One thing that sets me apart from others is my work on the state's pension shift. In 2012, the Governor included a pension shift in his budget. I worked with Howard County Executive Ken Ulman and the Maryland Association of Counties to organize *Stop the Shift*, a bi-partisan statewide coalition of county governments, boards of education, unions and other stakeholders to oppose it. The coalition generated an enormous amount of press coverage, communication and grass-roots pressure to halt or at least weaken the shift. We did reduce the cost of the shift.

I regret the fact that the state chose to impose the pension shift, a decision that will cost our county over \$40 million a year by FY17, funding that we could instead use for local needs such as education, libraries, and human services. I am proud of my work advocating for the interests of our public schools and our county as a whole.

I have also advocated publicly on school reform issues in my comments at council meetings and on social media. I believe that MCPS and its work with MCEA demonstrates that education policy is most successful when unions are leaders in making change. The collaborative approach is most effective and our results speak for themselves. Montgomery County Public Schools do not need "reform" in the sense that some advocate for public education. We do not need charter schools and our work to create our own accountability systems should be respected. Our schools do need effective management and resources in order to adapt to the challenges of our changing demographics. I believe that we are and will become more so a national model for how school systems can help disadvantaged children achieve their potential.

2. Over the next four years, how will you be an advocate for public education?

First and foremost, our public education institutions must have the resources they need to maintain their high standards. I will work to make sure that the operating and capital budgets of MCPS and Montgomery College contain enough local funds to meet their needs -- needs that are growing faster than many people recognize.

Also, I will work with other advocates in our county to obtain additional state aid for school construction. While state support for MCPS's operating budget has risen substantially since the Thornton plan was passed, state funding for school construction is actually lower now than it was in the 1999-2001 period. I hope to work with MCEA and other stakeholders to gain an improvement.

One area where I think we are underachieving is early childhood -- helping families cope with the challenges of providing care and helping children enter school prepared to succeed. When I think of our county's overall approach to meeting the challenge of growing poverty, I think we are doing many things

right: we have a strong public school system, a strong public transportation network, a unique public healthcare system for the uninsured, substantial investments in affordable housing, a higher local minimum wage and a higher local EITC. A missing piece is early childhood, and I want to make significant improvements in that area.

3. What are the three things you would like to accomplish in the next four years if you are elected to the Council?

1.) I would like to ensure that MCPS and Montgomery College have the resources they need to meet the challenges of an increasingly diverse student population. 2.) I would like to improve programs for early childhood and child care, which I believe is a key missing piece in our anti-poverty and achievement gap agenda. 3.) I would like to boost our county's local economy in order to ensure that we have the resources to meet our challenges, through creative and targeted initiatives such as my nightlife strategy and cybersecurity IT sector strategy and smart transportation investments such as the Purple Line and Corridor Cities Transitway.

4. What is your view of the current local tax structure? What, if any, changes would you advocate?

More than 85% of the county's local tax revenue comes from the income tax and the property tax. The income tax is at the state maximum (3.2%). The property tax is subject to the Ficker Amendment, which is probably the worst policy ever approved by Montgomery County voters. These two limitations in concert impede the county's ability to raise more revenues in a static environment.

That said, there are options for improvement. First, I have supported a high income tax offset credit (currently \$692 per principal residence) to make our property tax more progressive. I led the effort to defeat a [2011 proposal](#) by Council Member Phil Andrews to cut the offset credit for the purpose of cutting the property tax rate, which would have disproportionately benefited the wealthy. Second, I have introduced a [bill](#) to expand a property tax credit for low-income seniors to help them stay in their homes. Third, I support legislation at the state level that would help us create flexible tax districts to pay for infrastructure outside the charter limit. Fourth, I passed legislation to make our tax system more progressive by increasing our Earned Income Tax Credit. I will continue to look for options to expand progressivity in our tax code while ensuring that we collect adequate revenues.

Most importantly, we must have a dynamic economy to expand our tax base in the future. Robust economic growth is key to maintaining county services as well as our quality of life in the long term. As I often tell residents, if you want new school buildings, you need new office buildings to pay for them.

5. What is your view about what is working in MCPS? What would you like to see changed?

MCPS is one of the nation's best large public school systems. It has excellent leadership and exceptional employees who are fully committed to serving the diverse needs of our changing school population. In some of our schools, the children largely come from families with highly educated and affluent parents. In other schools, they do not. Our challenge is helping all of our children to achieve their potential. As the number of children from disadvantaged families grows, we will need to expand services targeted to their needs: English proficiency for example. We also need to devise new approaches to reward teachers who are willing to take on the tougher assignments. I know how hard it can be to teach in high poverty schools because my brother teaches at Walker Jones Elementary School in DC and his fiancée teaches at Argyle Middle school here in MCPS, and we talk about it all the time. It is an extraordinary challenge for these teachers to meet the incredible expectations that our families, community and even

country have set, and those who can take that responsibility and move forward need additional help.

I also believe that MCPS should recognize at least one of the Muslim Eid holidays.

6. What is your view of MCEA's role in education reform within MCPS?

Since the late 1990s, MCEA and the other school unions have established a cooperative and productive labor-management relationship with the leadership of MCPS. That relationship is a real benefit to leaders, employees and students alike. One example is the [Peer Assistance and Review program](#), which is a joint initiative of MCEA and management. I anticipate that MCEA will continue to play positive roles on issues including teacher evaluations, dealing with diverse student needs and innovating on teaching techniques such as project-based learning.

7. What ideas do you have for addressing the need for affordable workforce housing in Montgomery County?

Montgomery County is a hyper expensive place to live. A teacher's ability to afford housing is directly related to that teacher's compensation. Our compensation for teachers needs to be sufficient to attract the best qualified candidates, and they need to be able to afford housing here when they accept the job.

On housing policy, I have been a consistent advocate for affordable housing, helping to achieve victories such as:

- 1. Increasing set-asides in new development.** The council enacted an important change in the zoning code rewrite, incentivizing developers to build 15% of their units as MPDU affordable set asides rather than 12.5%.
- 2. Supporting accessory dwellings.** The council took action to make it significantly easier for a homeowner to create an accessory dwelling, which is a rental unit added to a house, with its own kitchen and bathroom.
- 3. Allowing more housing near public transportation.** A steady supply of new housing is an important ingredient for the overall affordability of the housing supply.
- 4. Boosting the Housing Initiative Fund.** We have increased funding substantially for acquisition and redevelopment of affordable housing.

I am proud of my work to increase the housing supply, increase incentives for affordable housing, and boost the county's own direct provision of affordable housing, but we have a lot more to do.

8. What do you believe is the current state of the relationship between the office of the County Executive and the County Council? What could you do to improve it?

I have had a productive working relationship with the County Executive and his staff during my time in office. I have found that close and regular communication, a flexible approach to pursuing priorities and genuine negotiation as opposed to seeking conflict are helpful in working on policy issues with the Executive Branch. I do wish that the budget process could involve more collaboration with the council up-front instead of the Executive-first, council-next process we have today. MCPS's budget process, in which key stakeholders are included early and remain involved up until (and even after) the release of the Superintendent's recommendation, could be a useful model for the county.

9. Now that revenues are increasing, what priorities would you have in restoring programs or agencies that need increased funding and how would you balance these competing needs?

The budget process is all about balancing needs, almost all of which are legitimate. In the past, I have focused on restoring funding for libraries, increasing funding for the county's Earned Income Tax Credit, providing money for health care services for the uninsured, and adding more money for Working Parents Assistance (to help pay for child care), among other priorities. This year, I am supporting a record increase in local money for school construction. I am still reviewing the executive's proposed budget and assessing where I would like to make changes in the council's final budget. Education must continue to be the highest priority, and I think we should fund as much as we can of the BOE's budget request for MCPS.

10. Do you believe funding MCPS above the minimum required level is necessary in order to support the growing and increasingly diverse student body, the need for increased services these students require, the need to attract and retain the best educators, and the costs of required new testing?

The state's new version of the Maintenance of Effort law is controversial inside the Montgomery County Government. Some have said that the floor it establishes has become a ceiling. I disagree with that view. The law has increased the risk associated with increasing the MCPS appropriation – specifically, the risk that an increase will be a permanent one if the state Board of Education does not grant the county a waiver in the future. That said, risk is a factor to be managed – not necessarily one that must be entirely avoided.

The council must also examine the real cost factors faced by MCPS. The public schools are confronting rising numbers of students needing free or reduced price meals and ESOL services. We need new programs to close the achievement gap. And MCPS must offer competitive compensation packages to attract and retain the best employees. The new contract just approved by MCEA contains increases that are actually below those recently awarded to other county employees. All of these priorities require funding.

And so I would support responsible increases above the minimum set in state law for the purpose of meeting these needs.

11. What would you describe as your most significant achievement as an elected official or community activist?

I have long believed in the merits of the Earned Income Tax Credit. By raising the after-tax income of low wage workers, the EITC rewards work and lifts people out of poverty. It is one of the nation's most effective anti-poverty programs. It is also proven to improve educational outcomes for children.

Montgomery County is one of the few local jurisdictions in the U.S. that has an EITC. Established in 2000, the county's EITC was set to match the state's EITC dollar-for-dollar. In 2010, the council changed the law to allow the county EITC to vary with budget decisions. The council promptly cut the EITC by a third *in the middle of a recession*.

When I came to the council, I was determined to restore the EITC. In 2012, I worked with my colleagues to win funding to push it up to a level of 75% of the state EITC. But that was not enough. In 2013, urged by Councilmember Ervin, the council jointly undertook a "SNAP challenge" during which each member would live on five dollars a day for five days. This event enhanced awareness of poverty, which is a

significant problem in our county. In its aftermath, I introduced [Bill 8-13](#), which fully restored the county's EITC in law. I had two (later three) co-sponsors for the bill. It attracted [significant opposition](#) from other members of the council. Some told me to give up. They said the bill could not pass.

Instead, I organized a large coalition including the Community Action Board, Progressive Maryland, MCGEO, Casa, non-profits and faith-based groups to support it. Of their own volition, they ran a petition drive, canvassed neighborhoods, wrote an [op-ed](#) and aggressively lobbied the council. After many months of work, the bill passed 9-0.

I am proud to have worked in partnership with these great organizations to help working people with the EITC. If I am reelected, I hope to work on behalf of more progressive priorities like this one.

12. Describe a political event that shaped your thinking about politics and/or your decision to run for public office.

I would like to resubmit the language I used in 2010 in response to this question, because it still says what I want to say best:

"I was raised in Oakland, California, in the Reagan years. I saw a deep divide in my community between people who had opportunity and people who did not. For example, in the school system, it was clear to me at an early age that I attended a high quality public elementary school, and there were schools in the city that were violent, scary, and did not foster learning and opportunity. I heard about a tax revolt and Prop 13, which slowly starved the schools of funding, and while staying home to take classes in support of teachers during numerous strikes, I saw a school system, a community and the California Dream on a steady march of decline.

My parents were politically active and we discussed community and national issues at the dinner table. I learned that our most serious problems require policy solutions and political change, and my experience in Oakland drove me to want to do something about it. I knew that I wanted to help build a progressive majority for change in this country, and I have found ways to do it. My contributions include helping to protect Social Security from privatization by the Bush Administration, elect President Obama, and expand health care for young adults, among many.

Serving on the Montgomery County Council is a new way for me to tackle these same problems. I believe in the power of good economic policy---decisions we make that shape the ability of a parent to provide for a family, of the family to contribute to society. I want to be sure our schools continue an upward march, because our education policy makes Montgomery County more than a great place to live, it makes it a decent place to live. I am deeply concerned about the environment and the impact of decisions we make at the county level about how we grow, and I know that we can do better than we have been doing for the past 60 years. I believe we must manage our government's finances with discipline and prudence, or a door will open for people whose only objective is to destroy government through measures like the Ficker Amendment and California's Prop 13. As the demographics of our county shift and low-income and disadvantaged populations make up more and more of our residents, I know we can and must find a way to stitch together one strong community that creates opportunity for all.

As I raise my own family here --- my son is 2 --- I want to make sure that we rise to meet our challenges."

I now have two boys, one 6 and one 3.