

Questions for Candidates for Mayor and Board of Aldermen for the City of Frederick

Full verbatim answers (without any editing for syntax, spelling or grammar) will be provided on the Chamber of Commerce website as a part of our effort to inform our members in preparation for the upcoming election.

Please provide a 250-word introduction in addition to your specific responses to the questions below.

Responses can be in the form of a word processor program attachment or embedded in an email. Email responses should be sent to rweldon@frederickchamber.org, and must be received by **COB August 8th, 2017**.

The Frederick County Chamber of Commerce recently led a fact-finding trip to Greenville South Carolina. The trip included Chamber staff, Board members, Chamber Partners-in-Trust, the County Executive, senior staff from the Mayor's Office, economic development staff from both the City and County, along with others. The purpose of the trip was to study the experience, strategies and partnerships that have led Greenville to an economic renaissance in housing, job creation and urban revitalization. Several themes emerged, but Greenville Mayor Knox White often remarked that a visionary, focused local government was essential to their success. It is within that context that we offer you the following questions. Unlike some questionnaires, we understand that **some of these responses will require more than a 100 word answer**. Therefore, we encourage you to express yourself fully on each question.

Alan E. Imhoff

Introduction:

Since moving to Frederick over 32 years ago, I have consistently given back to the community through service at City, County, State and Regional levels in three principal areas: education, government and planning. Of many awards and certificates of appreciation, the three I prize most are: recipient of the first DAD4PTA Award in 2003 from the Maryland PTA, the second is being made a Fellow, Academy of Excellence in Local Government in 2009 from the University of Maryland and recently receiving the Paul Harris Fellow Award of Rotary International for my lengthy and varied service to the community. Following retirement from AT&T as a Global Project Manager, I embarked on what has become a 19-year second career as an Adjunct Faculty member at FCC, having taught Finance, Understanding Business, Information Technology and Systems. Still serving the community with my third appointment to the City's Planning Commission, my appointment since 2003 on the Maryland Military Installation Council and as member of the Region Forward Initiative of the Washington Area Council of Governments since 2007. Currently on the Board of Directors for the non-profits of Frederick County Landmarks Foundation and of SeniorScapes. I serve on the Finance and Endowment committees of my church. In addition, I have been a consultant to provide strategic planning to the Chamber of Commerce, fiscal impact studies to Hood College and on major housing developments, as well as a S.W.A.T study to the County's Department of Economic Development. (241 words)

1. With the significant annual carrying costs, totaling over \$1 million, and the immense price tag put on the costs to fully develop the property as a regional park, how do you propose to make the Hargett Farm property an asset to the taxpayers of the City of Frederick and where do you expect to raise the money to improve the property with an estimated price tag approaching \$100 million?

When voting to approve the purchase of the Hargett as Alderman in 2009 our administration knew it would take at least 10 to 20 years to physically develop the park, especially as the first impacts of the “recession” were just being felt by all levels of government. I personally viewed the Hargett Farm as a very long-term investment, along the lines of Baker Park, that would develop a conceptual plan with input from a variety of stakeholder groups. Another long-term issue was the rerouting of Butterfly Lane to MD 180 (Jefferson Pike) that needed to be resolved as well. (99 words)

2. Blight has been an irritant for downtown residents and merchants for many years – how do you propose to address the situation to deal with examples like the Asiana building and other underutilized properties in the retail district? Unaddressed blight threatens to undermine the morale of property owners trying to keep and maintain a momentum for progress. What is your position?

At issue is the willingness of any administration to enforce laws already on the books, research current laws in other jurisdictions that may apply to the City of Frederick and, if necessary, be willing to go to condemnation. In a previous administration a Code Enforcement Manager from Hagerstown supplied information on their successes and failures, along with potential barriers to enforcement. An unwillingness to possibly incur a lawsuit appeared to be one of those potential barriers. I am willing to insure our laws are up to date and can remove blighted properties when necessary. (96 words)

3. Do you consider the tax/equity – sharing equation between the City and the County to be one which is fair to city taxpayers and if not, what do you intend to do about the situation? What is your position on the level of City taxes relative to services, and do you agree or disagree that City taxes are a hindrance to being competitive in attracting business, and residents, why or why not?

Tax equity has been and continues to be reviewed on a regular basis between municipal and county officials. I was involved in past reviews with our county peer municipalities and while serving as alderman. At issue is really the high assessments of the property within the corporate boundaries, whether residential or commercial. The City has enjoyed favorable recognition in its quality of life and diversity of its businesses for decades. This quality of life is reflected in the property assessments. By annually reviewing tax equity issues, the City can afford to lower the tax rate on its share of the property tax. (102 words)

4. Route 15 continues to be a traffic bottleneck which impacts all City residents and our businesses – what steps do you propose the City should take to address the problem?

As a State controlled highway, the City must always have improvements made to US 15 as their number one priority. Unfortunately, state funding for those improvements may take a decade or more. The City needs a citywide traffic flow analysis of how best to disburse traffic entering or exiting Route 15. Then assign capital funds to make our own internal road system more efficient in handling that traffic. Completion of Monocacy Boulevard/Christopher Crossing loop road is and must remain the City's top capital project. A potential eastern by-pass is being planned, but is decades away from solving the problem. (99 words)

5. Please provide one positive concrete idea to address the groups of homeless or disenfranchised who loiter for hours at a time around some of our more valuable public assets (Carroll Creek Linear Park, Baker Park, and the public library to name a few). What can be done to ensure our residents and businesses continue to use such assets or locate there.

Provide a City-owned facility operated by the Community Action Agency during the warmer months where those without shelter could at least find the services needed to maintain their lifestyle in an air-conditioned, safe environment. This could be similar in scope to the Alan Linton facility. (45 words)

6. Assuming you had the support, what one measure would you implement almost immediately upon being elected to office?

The most consistent complaint I hear is from homeowners about their property taxes. The assessed value, as determined by the State Assessor, is set every three years. Very rarely have those assessments gone down or remained the same. The best a City administration can do is to lower the tax rate per hundred dollars of assessment. This does not have to be a "Constant Yield" rate, but rather enough of a reduction every year the assessment increases, while maintaining a required increase in revenue to afford the rise in costs of providing the services residents have come to expect. (99 words)

7. What can the City do that it is not already doing to attract new businesses to enhance the assessable base within the City?

The biggest deficit in attracting businesses in the lack of large enough parcels of industrial zoned land M1 (Light Industrial), followed closely by MO (Manufacturing/Office). The City has done well in bringing businesses into the downtown area, especially through adaptive reuse of former industrial sites. Through judicious selection of annexations, the City can provide for the growing need of providing job opportunities to counterbalance the growth in residential

and commercial properties. Our Land Management Code needs to be reviewed to determine if changes are required to allow for the technological changes these new businesses may bring. (96 words)

8. What is your position on the East Street planning effort? How familiar are you with the corridor planning efforts currently underway? What would you like to see done differently with regard to the future of East Street?

The East Street planning effort has been underway for almost 12 years. Recently a draft of the East Street Corridor Small Area Plan was presented to the Planning Commission. This area encompasses over 2,000 acres with 7 major goals in the plan and is geared to continue and enhance the success of its residential uses. The area has also been earmarked as one of seven Activity Center's in 2012 for the Region Forward vision plan by the Washington Area Council of Governments. These centers emerged from the Transportation Planning Board, also of WASCOG, in 1998. It's time to implement! (99 words)

9. The State of Maryland recently decided to relocate the Department of Social Services out of the William Donald Schaeffer Building on All Saints Street. Moving those critical human services and programs may hamper client's efforts to access them. What can the City do to help ensure continued access to critical services? What is the City's responsibility in this regard, if any?

As often happens with governmental relocation of services, care must be given to those who use the services to be able to access those services. The City should work with County Transit Services to insure those needs are met. Even to the point, if necessary, of augmenting transit options. (49 words)

10. How do you as a candidate for office feel about the role of the City regulatory agencies (permits/inspections/planning/zoning/historic preservation)? Do you believe that City departments have an obligation to accommodate citizen and business owner requests that are legal, legitimate and appropriate? Do you think this is something that is already in place, could use some guidance, or needs a lot more focus and vision from the City elected leaders?

City regulatory agencies, to the best of my knowledge, are required to approve requests that "...are legal, legitimate and appropriate". The issues seem to arise in the interpretation of legal latitude given in the construct of those laws and/or regulations. The agencies are in turn, for the most part, overseen by appointed commissions where final decisions are made under such regulations as the Land Management Code. Proper training and perhaps required annual or bi-annual certification might be needed to maintain knowledge of application of those regulations. (86 words)

11. With the vibrant growth of downtown in recent years, Frederick has become a weekend destination for people from across the region. What types of investments do you feel the City should make to attract businesses and skilled workers to relocate to the City of Frederick permanently? Are there internal processes that you feel the City can improve upon to position it to be more attractive to prospective businesses and residents?

With the impact of the “Millennial Generation” on current trends in workplace environments, livability choices and effects of their choices; planners and elected officials throughout the region and country have focused on seven main principals for growth. They are: Sustainable, Attractive, Safe, Connected, Vibrant, Walkable and Complete. These in turn are reflected in the “Live Here, Work Here, Shop Here” mantra for at least the last decade. The downtown epitomizes that slogan. Now is time to offer that same success to other areas of the City. (86 words)
