

Jennifer Dougherty, Democratic Candidate for Mayor

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Frederick County Chamber of Commerce

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Intro (250 words)

In 1987, I opened my first business and had no idea I would serve as Mayor 15 years later. As a small business owner, I ran against – and beat – the odds! Lots of small businesses don't make it, but through hard work and a clear vision of my business, I made it! I continued to learn as a Chamber Member (serving as Chair of the Board), Heartly House Board Member, and Rotarian. As Mayor, I ran against the odds too – and got a lot done. Frederick has so much untapped potential it's time we address the things that are holding us back. We face some challenges and need a person in City Hall who knows how to lead – hiring a great Chief of Police, Carroll Creek Ph. I and the NACs were a few successes. I know we can think big, without ignoring the small stuff.

1. HARGETT FARM – This project is the darnedest thing I have seen in Frederick. About 12 years ago, the City bought an approved development at the height of the market using restrictive municipal bonds that they said they could not refinance (btw – they refinanced). They sat on the parcel for a decade paying \$1.5 million a year in debt service before they gave FCPS a great site for a new – and needed – elementary school for nothing. The projected loss of property taxes is \$ 1 million a year, plus at least \$ 15 million in lost impact fees for schools, parks, and water/sewer connections. The purchase was not in the Comprehensive Plan or the Budget and continues to impact affordable housing and water/sewer rates.

A year ago, the City paid \$250,000 for a consultant to design a fantastic – but unaffordable -- \$98.50 million park with multiple sports fields and a water park. This year, the City included \$2 million in the current capital budget for infrastructure improvements, but there is no money budgeted in the next 5 years for any build-out. The current Task Force is hard at work, with many City employees serving, but no one from the Finance Department is on the Task Force. You cannot complete a \$98.5 million project without the money people at the table!

I love sports, I love team sports. I played through college. I think sports help build character and good health, but this is financially silly and unfair to City taxpayers. The only likely way to pay – whether in parts or as a whole – is through debt funding (\$5,400 per household).

For comparison purposes, Carroll Creek flood control costs were about \$ 65 million, plus the two phases of the park (less than \$40 million). The difference is the economic engine that the Creek

continues to be with over \$150 million in private investment resulting in housing, jobs and tax revenue.

My recommendation is to divide the remaining land, build a very nice and more affordable facility and use the remaining half for private development (possibly senior housing to avoid school capacity concerns). This allows the City to develop a more affordable recreational facility, add to our housing stock and get a small portion of the property taxes back.

2. BLIGHT – I am the only person who has fought blight by bringing 20 W. 4th St. to the Board of Aldermen for condemnation for conditions of blight (2002). The resulting lawsuit took time to make its way through the Court system and the City “won” its appeal in 2006 (shortly after I left office). Just three months ago, the City finally sold the property to a rehab company.

I have acted before and I will do it again if needed. Those currently in office, have failed to act and should be held accountable for that failure – they passed new laws that went untested or unused, and they refused to use existing laws.

When dealing with blight, I will be clear, be fair and follow the Code. I will embrace the help offered by the NACs and watchdogs to help address the nagging problems of blight which are bringing down property values and the quality of life.

I will also recommend a Code Enforcement Board to remove the impression that politics plays a role in enforcement and minimize the need to take complaints to Court.

For the most chronic violators, I will bring the case for condemnation and use of eminent domain to the Board of Aldermen within 6 months of taking office after following a clear and unambiguous process with City staff (legal, code enforcement, planning, economic development and police). Until the City proves its commitment, chronic violations will continue and people will lose faith in the system.

3. TAX EQUITY/SERVICES/COMPETITIVE– We must reform the City-County Tax Differential. It is the first issue on my platform. This is big and getting bigger. City taxpayers – residential and business – leave a lot of money on the table in Winchester Hall. We will begin to address it with the County in the first month in office so the issue is resolved before the State/County elections in 2018 and our FY19 Budget reflects the change.

As time marches on, we must admit that City services need to focus on results. As an important example, the weeds and grass that pop up in our yards, also pop on public rights-of-way. The cigarette butts that litter the tree wells in front of bars/restaurants on Saturday morning are not the only trash littering our streets. The difference is, the homeowners and businesses take care of their yards and sidewalks (out of pride or fear of a violation). Who notices when the City fails to do its work?

We are going to hold City employees accountable and follow strategies used by other communities that raise expectations and levels of service from delivering community policing, to clean streets and parks, and improved sidewalks/paths.

The City rate of growth is healthy. People and businesses want to be here, but reluctance to address spending, tax rates and services risks steady growth. If we reform our approach, our long-term planning and growth will be stronger and more reliable.

4. ROUTE 15 BOTTLENECK SOLUTIONS – We will convene an annual transportation review for City projects with County/State/Federal partners focused on getting more money for our needs. One important project is the use of Monocacy Blvd as a north-south connection to reduce traffic on City streets (Market and East) and Route 15. A possible option is to synchronize East Side development with relocation of I-70 exit ramps to reduce congestion on narrow Downtown streets.
5. GROUPS of HOMELESS/DISENFRANCHISED – Five years ago, I proposed the placement of a Police Kiosk on Carroll Creek to serve as the base of operations along the Creek. It can serve as a spot for police segways to charge, CCTV monitors for public cameras and possibly public washrooms (European models are self-sanitizing). The Kiosk can also serve as a welcome center for DFP or other groups coordinating activities along the Creek.

I will work with FCAA and other social service providers to improve the results in dealing with at-risk and homeless people. First, we will deal with housing and then improve community integration, job training and placement, as well as mental health services if needed.

Public space is open to all, but there are times when the public space becomes over-run with people bullying for space...that's not fair or right.

6. ONE MEASURE TO IMPLEMENT – I want to restore Bulk Trash Pick-up.
7. STEPS TO ATTRACT NEW BUSINESSES – We will focus on the basics of the Department of Economic Development (which I created in 2002): Retain, Expand and Recruit businesses. To improve effectiveness, we will hire an Industry Specialist to focus on bringing a new regional headquarters and building on existing businesses.

Updating City operations is a must. We created the 1-Stop Shop with the building of the City Hall Annex; now, we will make on-line permitting effective and simple.

Workforce Development will continue to be a challenge until we foster a more effective relationship with FCC, government and the business community. During our business inventory tours, we will improve our database of businesses and their needs. With unemployment at extremely low levels, we need to make sure we have the workforce programs that suit our existing businesses and are agile enough to serve new businesses.

Tax incentives were tools used during my term (2002-2006) that encouraged investment in the newly-created Arts & Entertainment District, Golden Mile Tax Credit District as well as other

retail corridors. We also used fee waivers for large employers to expand (MedImmune/Astra Zeneca) and bring more jobs to Frederick. These can be effective tools in bringing new businesses to Frederick and they are zero net costs.

8. EAST STREET PLANNING EFFORT – ANY DIFFERENCES?

For many years, we have discussed the East Street Corridor, this draft plan is a great next step. During my term, we completed the sidewalks to 5th Street and making the public investment is always a good start to private investment. As a natural extension of the Downtown, the importance of the sidewalks cannot be overstated to creating a healthy mix of residential and commercial development. The public process to adopt the draft plan and its 7 goals is important to its success. I want to make sure that the Neighborhood Advisory Councils are heavily involved in the process.

If elected, my job is to make it happen! Take the elements that require City planning and investment -- sidewalks, lighting and intersection improvements – and work with the Board of Aldermen to fund them in the capital budget. Using Carroll Creek Park as an example, we proved that once the City makes its investment, private investors make their projects happen. When we approved the Creek investment, the Bakers at LaPaz made their move, Brad Tavel invested in the condos and commercial space that remain the core of the Creek development.

9. RELOCATION of DSS...CITY STEPS TO MAINTAIN ACCESS TO SERVICES... CITY'S RESPONSIBILITY?

It's too bad that the State decided to move DSS out of Downtown, but it creates a good opportunity to shake up our existing programs to make sure we are focused on client services and results – housing, job training and placement. It also creates a chance to determine who the clients are – City or County residents – and where they should best access services.

10. ROLE of REGULATORY AGENCIES? OBLIGATION TO ACCOMMODATE CITIZEN and BUSINESS REQUESTS? ALREADY in PLACE, NEED GUIDANCE, MORE FOCUS?

I congratulate and thank people willing to serve on local boards and commissions. The “sense of place” that we celebrate in Frederick is because of decades of commitment by these volunteers. We don't win accolades like Best Place to Live without work. So, while I may not always agree with a decision, I won't criticize their overall work. Often, the boards and commissions take the heat for errors or oversights by the elected officials who may have missed something or are grateful to push the “hot potatoes” back to the volunteers.

I propose an annual conference of the Mayor and Board of Aldermen with all regulatory boards plus my new Code Enforcement Board and the Neighborhood Advisory Councils. The purpose of these conferences is to promote better communication, have the boards tell the elected officials what obstacles exist and recommend legislative updates that will ease their work.

A couple of current headlines could have been avoided if the elected officials had acted differently: 1) Downtown Hotel / Birely Tannery Demolition – If the Mayor had worked with all interested parties to get together from the beginning, obstacles could have been avoided and a more collaborative process would have eased the process. 2) Demolition on Magnolia Avenue – Some saw this coming and don't see any legislative protection. It is possible for the Mayor to sign an Executive Order placing a hold on any residential demolitions until the Board of Aldermen review existing regulations on residential demolitions. A possible change could include no demolitions until the Planning Commission approves the new house.

11. FREDERICK as WEEKEND DESTINATION. WHAT TYPES OF INVESTMENTS SHOULD CITY MAKE TO ATTRACT BUSINESSES AND SKILLED WORKERS to RELOCATE PERMANENTLY? INTERNAL PROCESSES to BECOME MORE ATTRACTIVE TO PROSPECTIVE BUSINESSES / RESIDENTS?

Without repeating my response in #7: We will think big, but not ignore the small stuff. There is a lot of low-hanging fruit with empty buildings, opportunities for North End development with parking that could bring a grocery store and in-fill development and really fighting blight.

Know What We Have – Make sure the data in the Department of Economic Development is current; Understand who is here and their growth prospects; Identify their labor force needs; Link workers to industry and follow up to make sure the workers fit the job.

Modernize City Operations – Use technology to help ease permits, licensing and bill payment.

Address Tax Policy – City/County Tax Differential; Business Personal Property Tax (accelerate elimination); Measure what we do in government to make services a good value for taxpayers.

Manage the Entire City – So many issues in campaigns are focused on the Downtown, which is the core of our City. It was important when I served before to create a Dept. of Economic Development to look at the whole City. The Golden Mile, East Side Development and northern sites (State Farm) need attention. If we want to grow businesses that match our community, we will work at it, so I will invest more in the department and be willing to use legislation to recruit businesses that grow jobs.

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