

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.

Hello! I am asking for your support on September 12, 2017 to be your next Frederick City Alderman. I have spent the last two decades helping Frederick reach its full potential. I have volunteered my time with amazing non-profits such as The Frederick Arts Council, The Frederick Center, The Weinberg Center, The MET, and many others. I have managed a productive Frederick City business since 2008 and have just finished overseeing a renovation of an 8,000 square foot 19th century mansion on Market Street. I am also currently the co-coordinator of Neighborhood Advisory Council 7.

I pride myself in being a consensus builder working with various entities on complex issues to bring about a resolution benefitting the greatest number of Frederick City residents. I believe that the job of an elected official is to work with citizens to address issues and provide results. My successes have been recognized by The Community Foundation being named the 2013 Wertheimer Fellow for excellence in volunteerism and by Hood College in 2012 by being named the Justice Thurgood Marshall award recipient for promoting campus diversity. I was also featured in Frederick Magazine's 2016 People to Watch.

My experience in the non-profit, public, and private sectors make me uniquely qualified for this position. I hope, after reading my responses, you feel that I am capable of being your elected representative. If you have any questions regarding my answers or have other community issues you'd like to make known, please contact me at kfair@krisfair.com.

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.

Remember that a reader will only give you a limited amount of attention, so brevity will help ensure readership. We will NOT edit your responses, either, so use care with your work! If you write it, Chamber members will read it!

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?

While meeting with voters, I have heard from many of them about the lack of public playing field resources in Frederick City. Neighbors of Baker Park have voiced their concerns that, especially during summer months, the parks are booked with games and practice from 7 in the morning until dusk. The addition of the new Hargett Park would help ease that schedule and help add playing fields to our city.

Additionally, our neighbors on the west end need an easily accessible and fully functional park. While a pool and other recreational facilities are available downtown, getting to these resources can be challenging for people on the west end of Frederick City, especially on the weekends when Mass Transit services are essentially non-existent. The over 11,000 residents living in the immediate vicinity of Hargett Farm would greatly benefit from this resource.

I do have reservations about this project. When approaching a large project like Hargett Farm it is essential that we answer two key questions:

- First, are the amenities that are being proposed essential to the needs of Frederick City residents?
- Second, how can a project like this be phased to reduce cost overruns and avoid negatively impacting the budget?

As Alderman, I look forward to reviewing these questions thoroughly with city staff and elected colleagues; and if alternative measures to the current design could save us money and lower the burden on taxpayers, I will entertain those ideas. On this, I believe the 100-million-dollar price tag is too high.

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?

Residents across Frederick City agree that blighted properties are a major concern. In addition to having a negative visual impact, blighted properties can be magnets for increased crime, can create safety hazards for pedestrians and neighboring properties, detract from the City's tax base, and importantly, decrease community property values.

As Alderman, I propose we pursue a threefold approach to remediate blighted properties in a timely manner. First, greater levels of scrutiny and attention should be paid to these properties. The City should formalize, announce, and publish on the City website a list of blighted properties that have earned this designation, citing specific criteria that defines a property as blighted. A review of the properties on this list for the longest amount of time might be cited at Aldermanic meetings as well.

Secondly, a special process for citation and fining should be established that would create incentives for owners of these blighted properties to take action to address the reasons why they are being judged as blighted.

Thirdly, the City should foster and encourage entrepreneurial investment in these properties. Through its Department of Economic Development, staff should identify property owners who are looking to expand in, or move to, Frederick City. When a piece of property is designated as blighted, the City could offer a special tax-incentive for entrepreneurs who are willing to purchase the property and then rehabilitate it within a certain time period.

This phased approach will help identify problem properties, help motivate owners to address the blight in a timely manner, and promote turnover of these properties to owners willing to invest in them. In so doing, this will also generate new economic opportunities for the City.

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?

Question A: Fairness of taxing between the city and county. The city and county have hired a consultant to review and objectively answer this question. I am looking forward to seeing the results because I believe that the burden does fall more heavily on the city taxpayer. Depending on the results of that study, I would propose we review earlier studies on this topic in order to reaffirm or upgrade our understanding of any identified duplicated services provided by both the county and city. If any duplicated services are found we should eliminate either the overhead (caused by the city providing the service) or county service (so only the city would provide that service).

Question B: Level of city taxes relative to services. I believe there is general consensus that the tax burden for city residents is high. However, I have also found that when discussing that burden with city voters, they do not mind it when they see tangible results. Essentially, city services needs to match the burden paid. Many residents compliment the city on its wide array of services that it provides and the support it has in its various departments. Most residents I have spoken to believe we need to expand the city's efforts in a cost-prudent manner and

become more proactive. Further, I think the city should do more to support efforts to address homelessness, proactively enforce code enforcement, make sure our streets are clean, and support greater visibility of law enforcement, especially in areas of concern with high crime rates.

Question C: Taxes as hindrance to attracting businesses and residents. I believe taxes can be considered a hindrance for one primary reason; the government is not providing resources to the community to support its residents and businesses. As someone who has worked for five small businesses in Frederick City over the last 20 years, I can say that I never once heard the owners of those businesses suggest that they would move out of the city because of their taxes. I did, however, hear that they did not feel supported and that they were concerned that the city would not invest in their economic future. I respect that some business owners will find the tax burden to be too high, and I want to review our current tax structure to see if there is potential savings to businesses and residents; but the overarching theme that I am hearing is that residents want to know that their community is growing and supported.

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?

Route 15 not only serves as a bottleneck to the community but continues to act as a visual barrier separating the West end of Frederick from the rest of the community. The first step to addressing this issue is to review our support of Mass Transit systems in Frederick City. As a population of over 70,000 individuals, we need to move forward with a plan to effectively move those residents throughout the city (and the immediate areas surrounding the city). I propose that we increase the availability of mass transit options through commuter buses and circulars. We need to also increase the hours of operation to better accommodate residents during the day, at night, and on the weekends.

The city is currently investigating the expansion of Route 15 that will provide short term easing of traffic congestion but this is not a long term solution to this challenge. We also need to work with our county, state, federal, and private partners to address the MARC train schedule to make it more convenient for travelers and increase the bus schedule to Shady Grove metro. Finally, I would also continue the conversation about how we could extend the metro, light rail, or some other mass transit option closer to Frederick County. This would be a huge project that would take years to complete but we need to push this discussion now.

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.

Residents are tired of what is perceived to be inaction on this issue as the number of homeless continue to creep up. I believe that we need to tackle this issue on many different fronts at once. First, we need to have law enforcement walking the beat. The stats are there, when law

enforcement officers are a visual presence they are better connected to the community and better able to connect people with resources, like shelters.

Residents also report that a latent effect of homelessness is due to the amount of trash left behind in many areas, including Carroll Creek Linear Park, the C. Burr Artz Library, North Pointe, and Mullinix Park. We need to aggressively attack littering. Government's responsibility is to enforce the laws and if a person cannot follow those laws, there are consequences. If fining doesn't work, we should be barring individuals from these spaces.

We will not fully tackle this situation without working with our homeless population too. Many are homeless through no fault of their own and just need the right resources. The city should be playing the facilitator role here. With all the amazing organizations working on this issue, the city should be actively supporting those groups, finding out their needs, and connecting them to any additional resources we can provide. We also need a full time 24/7 care facility where the homeless can go to receive counseling services, food, and a place to sleep.

These are just three of what are dozens of potential solutions we could come up with. I hope that the city staff, officials, and citizens can collaborate to find the answers to these issues. It has to be a team effort. As we know with the organizations working on homelessness, they can make a small impact on the issue independently, but major structural changes can be accomplished when we are all working in unison.

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

I would immediately move to codify and strengthen the structure of our neighborhood advisory councils. I believe that NAC's are citizens first line to discuss issues relating to their neighborhoods but honestly, those concerns are lost if elected officials do not know what issues are being discussed. As NAC 7 coordinator, I have recorded many concerns of the citizens of our region. I believe it would be beneficial to have at least one or two mandatory meetings with the Mayor, the Board of Alderman, and the NAC coordinators to review these issues. Currently, NAC coordinators do not have a scheduled time to meet with the elected officials in the city. If the Aldermen or Mayor do not show up to the NAC meeting, they may never be aware the concern even exists. I believe that, sometimes, issues aren't addressed because the elected officials aren't aware of the issues, not because they are ignoring them.

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

Many businesses are looking to move to Frederick City and I believe the staff does a great job of reaching out and talking to business partners to encourage them to operate here. I believe we could build on the great work that city staff does by helping businesses navigate the necessary documents, procedures and regulations to operate. We can resolve this issue while creating a

positive government/business relationship by welcoming each business to our community with an introduction packet.

The Business Welcome Packet would include a personal letter from the Mayor and Board of Aldermen, a letter from the department of economic development, a list of necessary contact resources, and an overview of building development. Business owners will be informed when they have to apply for permits and what departments they will need to apply through depending on what project they undertake. Questions pertaining to historic preservation, signage, and other inquiries can be quickly answered in a proactive and positive way following this process.

Preferably a City official would personally welcome the business to the community. Building that relationship early will increase the likelihood of a positive business climate creating incentives for businesses to stay and expand in Frederick City.

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?

I believe that the city is moving in the right direction for the East Street Planning effort. The new East Street small area plan adopted by the Board of Aldermen balances the need for growth in the region with the unique existing industrial footprint that has dominated East Street for decades. I believe that as we begin to phase in that small area plan we need to review how this new corridor is going to be different from Market Street. We need to solicit feedback on multiple occasions from residents to understand their needs in this project as well. Finally, we need to make sure that infrastructure upgrades are accounted for through development projects to make sure we do not place burden on existing residents.

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?

The relocation of the Department of Social Services is having a major effect on the poor and elderly communities. Access to those services are no longer at a location that is walkable for the largest constituency of Frederick County. This issue is also compounded by the lack of mass transit services in Frederick City. I believe that if we can offer a more extensive and robust mass transit schedule, the relocation of DSS would have minimal effect on services provided to Frederick City residents.

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?

Question A: How do you as a candidate for office feel about the role of the City regulatory agencies (permits/inspections/planning/zoning/historic preservation)?

I believe our regulatory agencies play a critical role in the function of our city and make sure we maintain the attributes that make Frederick City consistently one of the top ten cities in the country to live. I also believe that our staff supports inquiring businesses and citizens with their requests. Under some circumstances, however, staff does not have the necessary latitude to break from the rigidity of code, and in those cases, I know businesses and residents can feel that their voices are not being heard.

Frederick City Alderman should do more to empower our staff so they can make logical, well-reasoned arguments for approving or denying a request. Recently I encountered a situation like this on a project at 1201 North Market Street. We had identified an environmentally safe way to rehabilitate a six inch, 80-year-old sewer line without disturbing the ground or the large oak tree lining 12th street. After we completed the project, we were told that because there was a part of the line that held one inch of standing water, we had to tear the entire line out, destroy the root system of the oak tree, and place an all new sewer line in its place. When we inquired about any possibility of waiving that requirement, we were told they could not because the code did not give the staff any latitude in these case-by-case situations. Not only did this revelation tie up the project for a few extra days, it also cost the property owner thousands of dollars in repair fees, administrative fees, and excavation fees.

Additionally, residents and businesses should have easy recourse when they believe the city has erred in their judgement. I do not believe that the resident should have to file a lawsuit in circuit court to contest a planning decision. I also believe that residents need to have a web portal on the City of Frederick web page to better express their ideas and concerns regarding permitting, rulings, and general feedback.

Finally, The City's current online portal offers opportunities for citizens to view projects in the city. Listing the projects, however, creates a challenge for people trying to ascertain where certain projects are happening and how they interact with other projects. If a resident is unsure about the name of a development project they are unlikely to be able to identify them inside the list of dozens of other projects occurring concurrently.

We should also develop an Interactive Online Map portal that will allow visitors to see, in real time, current city projects, their location, and a quick reference to what stage the development project is in. This will include pertinent data such as hearing dates, staff reports, and commission reports. Additionally, information about the development process will be streamlined on the City website assisting both project contractors and interested citizens.

Question B: Do you believe that City departments have an obligation to accommodate citizen and business owner requests that are legal, legitimate and appropriate?

Yes, as I believe is currently the case.

Question C: 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?

As noted in my answer to the first question, more focus by elected leaders is needed to enable some additional flexibility at the staff level.

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?

I believe Frederick City should:

- Support CREST and allied higher educational institutions like Hood, FCC, and Mount St. Mary's, and encourage town / gown interactions
- Support and expand small business incubators
- Support East Frederick Rising and the Golden Mile Alliance as well as the downtown hotel and redevelopment of the post office property since the renewal of these areas will expand housing and retail commercial areas
- Support more infill development like North Pointe

On another note, regarding our elected officials' direct role in this process, as director of The Frederick Festival of the Arts, a unique opportunity presented itself a few years back that helped underscore to me ways the city could be helping to make itself more attractive to businesses and residents. A couple of artists at the festival were visiting for the first time, and as part of The Frederick Festival of the Arts effort, committee members strived, as always, to make sure that these and other artists felt welcomed and informed about the city while they were here. We made such an impact on these artists regarding the beauty and amenities of the city that shortly after the festival they moved to Frederick City where they have been living for the last three years.

I believe there is no lack of new, innovative ways our city officials and staff can connect with businesses and individuals to share just the special attributes of Frederick City. For example, our elected officials should publically support our non-profits in their endeavors to reach out to the region to invite people to attend events and fundraisers. City of Fredrick officials should be on site at these events, promoting the amazing opportunities and beauty of Frederick City. There should be a booth with information about the city and representatives on hand to answer any questions visitors might have.

Through an extensive marketing effort undertaken by The Frederick Festival of the Arts committee, the 2015 Festival brought more than 20,000 visitors to Frederick over two days. In 2017, the Frederick Pride committee brought over 7,000 people to downtown Frederick on a Saturday. These events – along with Celebrate Frederick’s Wine festival and dozens of other events – can be utilized to draw people to move to Frederick City.
