



AIM County Council Candidate Questionnaire

Responses from Melissa McKenna candidate for At-Large

Affordable Housing

How would you work with AIM to increase the Housing Initiative Fund to \$100M by the year 2022? Such a funding level would be a six-fold increase in four years and is an aggressive goal. Some revenue is supported by recordation tax premium and contributions from developers on new projects and is therefore dependent on the overall building climate in the metropolitan region. I am skeptical we could reach \$100M by 2022 given many tax changes and uncertainties at the Federal level. I would like to discuss how that amount was reached and if there are other ways we could make progress toward the intended goal of greater numbers of affordable housing units.

How would you work with AIM to put 200 units of affordable housing on public land, in the development pipeline each year?

Available county land is scarce. Creative partnerships will be necessary through the HIF to preserve, acquire, or convert existing housing units into affordable units. We may also have to seriously consider repurposing our vacant office space, especially entire buildings. If a hotel and the Lorton jail can become apartments, certainly we can come up with a way to use these spaces for housing. We also need to take better advantage of the Payment in Lieu of Taxes (PILOT) program to retain or provide affordable housing at another site. How much can be accomplished annually may depend on the pace of development projects under construction in the county.

Equity in Schools

How will you work with AIM to expand the Excel Beyond the Bell Elementary program to four additional Title I elementary schools each year so that the program serves 2,400 students by the year 2022?

I have been very impressed and proud of the work AIM has done to organize school families and staff to advocate for Excel Beyond the Bell Elementary (EBBE) at their schools. Tremendous turnout at Council operating budget hearings for South Lake ES (2 years ago), Burnt Mills ES last year, and New Hampshire Estates last night (4/12/18). I know and have worked with the PTA president at the time and those principals, respectively. The greatest challenge to increasing this fantastic program is funding. Then scaling, coordination, and staffing. EBBE serves 120 students at 4 ES (30 per school) at a cost of ~\$184K. Given 25 Title I schools, on one “class” per school would be 750 students and cost \$4.6M. For 2400, \$18.7M. Scaling to increase to 20 times current size in 4 years is extremely aggressive. What I can tell you is that I have a proven track record of getting funding for education and will do all I can for EBBE as well as the MS EBB program and other out-of-school time activities.

Protecting Immigrants and Refugees

Many Montgomery County families are living in fear of one or more parent being separated from their children because of deportation. How will you work with AIM to include funding for deportation defense



and family preparedness in the county budget, as well as work with AIM to find private funding for these efforts?

We have seen the stress on our students of immigrant parents afraid that no one may be home for them when they return from school. Parents are fearful to come to school or complete paperwork that would provide them needed support. Specifically to free legal representation, many groups and nonprofits provide pro bono services. The County must unfortunately consider that direct funding for legal representation to people facing deportation could jeopardize the County's receipt of Federal money. That issue needs to be resolved first. Grants, foundations, and private funding could be leveraged to best collective advantage. The County could work with our many nonprofit providers to pool expertise, resources, and coordinate these efforts.

Will you commit to work with AIM and Montgomery County landlords to house refugees in Montgomery County?

Yes. Discriminatory practices will be tolerated. Refugee families are often sponsored through faith organizations and have strong community support. We also need to keep in mind services and supports for children in MCPS and ensure the resources are in place and accessible.

Transportation

Will you work with AIM to protect good transportation jobs from privatization?

Yes. Privatization would lessen accountability and impact service quality/reliability. At no point would I ever support privatizing MCPS bus operators.

How will you hold WMATA accountable to prevent cutting bus service in the county, particularly to low-income areas?

Yes, however low ridership routes are a challenge. I believe we need to think about transit in a new way in general. While there is a great focus on and push for using mass transit, I'm not sure it exists where and when people want/need it. We need better data on this. Transit options must be where people need to travel between, not necessarily where they currently exist. We should explore bus rideshare startups (like Bridj, Chariot, and others) that challenge our concept of traditional mass transit through crowd sharing. This would not only reduce costs but allow on-demand usage rather than set route times.

Democracy with Accountability

Do you commit to meeting with AIM within a month of taking office, and on a quarterly basis subsequently?

Absolutely.