

Steve Solomon
Gaithersburg Germantown Upcounty Chamber
County Council At-Large Candidate Questionnaire

Instructions: please respond to the questions below. Please save your completed file as a PDF file that includes your name in the filename, and email back to pross@ggchamber.org. Responses will be posted verbatim with your formatting as 1) PDF linked on our website primary election page, and 2) PDF linked on our social platforms, in the order in which they are received. Thank you for your candidacy and for your attention to Upcounty concerns.

Please respond with a short answer to the following questions:

TRANSPORTATION :

-Transportation is critical to our economic growth. How are you going to work with the County Executive and the Governor to address the congestion on the Upper I270 corridor?

Transportation remains one of the most pressing concerns for Upcounty residents, and the I-270 corridor is at the center of that. Because the highway is controlled by the state, changes will depend on how the County Council, County Executive, and the Governor work together. Reducing congestion will require a mix of strategies—coordinating with the state on roadway improvements, expanding transit options like MARC upgrades, and aligning land-use decisions so more people can live and work closer to Upcounty jobs. The goal is to create a transportation system that supports economic growth without forcing residents into long commutes.

ECONOMIC GROWTH AND TAXES:

-Our County budget is outpacing growth of our population and growth of our business economy. What concrete steps will you take to invite investment to Montgomery county – for both small and large businesses – to grow the economy, allowing us to maintain the level of services in our county budget? Where does the Upcounty fit into your plans?

Montgomery County’s budget has nearly doubled in the last 10 years. But incomes and business have not grown at that rate and can’t keep up. This is not sustainable and we see the results in the cuts in this year’s budget. We need a more predictable, business-friendly environment—one where permitting is faster, regulations are clearer, and both small and large businesses feel welcomed. The Upcounty should play a larger role in the county’s growth strategy, with targeted infrastructure investments, support for small businesses, and incentives for industries like biotech,

cybersecurity, and advanced manufacturing. The idea is to create a climate where businesses want to invest, expand, and hire locally.

-In one sentence, what is the biggest mistake the current Executive and Council has made regarding the county's economic growth?

Our permitting and inspections are too slow and are hurting businesses from starting, growing, and succeeding.

-The Germantown Master Plan previously called for over 60,000 jobs in Germantown, which did not come to fruition because Upcounty infrastructure needs have been ignored for decades. How would you reverse this result to grow Upcounty job centers?

We have been underinvesting in infrastructure for decades, particularly in Upcounty—roads, transit, utilities, and public amenities. Reversing that trend would require a renewed focus on infrastructure-first development, partnerships with institutions like Montgomery College and the Universities at Shady Grove, and modern mixed-use development that match what today's companies are looking for. The Upcounty has the land, the workforce, and the potential; the challenge is aligning public investment with private-sector needs.

PUBLIC SAFETY:

-Businesses are increasingly concerned about juvenile crime trends in the Upcounty. What changes, if any, would you pursue in addressing crime, particularly among juveniles?

We need a balanced approach—one that pairs accountability with intervention. That might include stronger diversion programs for first-time offenders, and closer collaboration between police, schools, and community organizations. Many communities have also found success with business-police partnerships that improve communication and help prevent crime in commercial areas. I also support returning SROs to our high schools.

HOUSING:

-Employers cite workforce housing as a barrier to attracting talent. How would you expand diverse and attainable housing options—especially near Upcounty job centers?

The lack of attainable housing makes it harder to recruit and retain talent. Expanding housing options near Upcounty job centers is a key part of the solution. This could involve transit-oriented development around Germantown and Shady Grove, and zoning updates that allow more missing-middle housing. The goal is to create neighborhoods where teachers, nurses, technicians, and young professionals can afford to live close to where they work.

EDUCATION:

-Attracting and retaining the next generation workforce is a top Chamber priority. The Chamber supports investment in Montgomery College, The Universities at Shady Grove, and MCPS. What is your vision for partnering with these institutions to strengthen the county's talent pipeline? What strategies will you pursue to keep young professionals in Montgomery County, especially in Upcounty communities?

Montgomery College, the Universities at Shady Grove, and MCPS are essential to building the county's future workforce. We need to emphasize the importance of strengthening partnerships between these institutions and local employers—expanding internship pipelines, aligning training programs with industries, and creating clearer pathways from high school to college to career. Retaining young professionals requires more than education alone; housing and transportation changes tie in to this solution.

-Under Maryland's Maintenance of Effort (MOE) law, the county is legally prohibited from ever spending less per student than it did the previous year. This creates a ratchet effect; where every emergency increase or one-time bonus becomes the permanent, mandatory floor for the future—even if performance metrics drop. Would you be willing to hold the budget at the absolute legal minimum—effectively a no-growth budget—until the Board of Education agrees to a third-party forensic audit of their central office management? And if so, how will you defend that decision to the teachers union (MCEA) when they label it an attack on educators during your next budget cycle? If not, what strategy will you employ to ensure the return on

the taxpayer's investment to MCPS.

The Maintenance of Effort law could put us in a difficult situation because it prevents the county from reducing per-student spending, even when emergency situations occur. I would like to see a third-party audit. Either way, the underlying question is how to ensure that taxpayer investments in MCPS translate into strong outcomes for students.

Please respond YES or NO to the following questions:

Education:

-Do you support the reinstatement of uniformed School Resource Officers to local high schools?

YES

-Do you support funding MCPS above the Maintenance of Effort?

DEPENDS IF THE BUDGET CAN AFFORD IT

-Do you support holding MCPS to higher account for their portion of our County budget, particularly those funds above MOE?

YES

-Would you support opening a conversation with the State Board of Education about oversight of the MCPS budget and accountability?

YES

Public Safety

-Do you support the expansion of the Drone as a First Responder program further into the Upcounty?

DON'T KNOW ENOUGH ABOUT THIS

-Facial Recognition: Will you support the Montgomery County Police Department's use of facial recognition technology for investigating violent crimes?

YES

-Police Retention: Will you commit to a one-time retention bonus for all sworn officers with 5+ years of experience to address the current staffing vacancy crisis?

YES

Housing:

-There were approximately 2000 housing permits filed in the county for new projects in 2024, and fewer than 50 in 2025. Do you support repeal of the Rent Stabilization legislation, which has resulted in a nearly 100% drop in permits filed for rental housing construction?

YES

-Missing Middle Zoning: Do you support allowing duplexes and triplexes to be built in neighborhoods currently zoned strictly for single-family homes?

DEPENDS ON THE NEIGHBORHOOD AND LOCATION

-Developer Incentives: Would you support Transit-Oriented Development that grants automatic enterprise zone status to developers building near Metro or Purple Line stations?

YES

-Eviction Notice: Do you support the 2026 requirement that landlords must provide a minimum of two weeks notice before an eviction can proceed, even in cases of non-payment?

DON'T KNOW ENOUGH ABOUT THIS

Economic Development & Taxation:

-Tax Limit Bypass: Will you pledge to vote no on any property tax increase that utilizes the school funding loophole to bypass the County Charter's requirement for a unanimous Council vote?

YES

-Special Taxing Districts: Do you support the creation of new Special Taxing Districts for residents and businesses to fund infrastructure projects?

YES

Oversight & Quality of Life:

-Leaf Blower Enforcement: Do you support the use of noise code inspectors to issue the maximum \$500 fine to homeowners and landscapers still using gas-powered leaf blowers?

NO

-The gas-powered leafblower ban last year has cost our small landscaping businesses thousands of dollars each in equipment and lost time. Some of our larger landscapers have had to reinvest tens of thousands of dollars in equipment and infrastructure. Did you vote for (or for those of you not on the council, would you have voted for) the onerous legislation that banned the use of gas-powered leafblowers for our landscaping community?

NO

-Will you vote yes or no on any capital project that adds new lanes of travel for gas-powered vehicles (excluding dedicated bus lanes)?

DEPENDS ON THE DETAILS OF THE PROJECT

-The decision to remove M83, the long-planned and never-funded eastern arterial to I270 and Great Seneca Highway's eastern counterpart, from the transportation master plan was detrimental to the growth and needs of our Clarksburg community. Did you vote to remove (or for those of you not on the council, would you have voted to remove) M83 from the transportation master plan?

NOT SURE

-Do you support the recent charter amendment that reduced the County Executive's term limit from three terms down to two?

NO

One last question –

What do you feel is the most important issue for Upcounty business owners and residents to consider during this election season?

Will Upcounty businesses get the permitting and inspection reforms that we need, and will our residents and businesses in Upcounty get the same infrastructure and economic investment that the down county is getting.