

Kate Stewart
Montgomery County Council
District 4

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Q. Why are you running for county office? *

Over two decades ago I decided to move to Montgomery County. At the time, I was thinking about the future – finishing grad school at UMD, buying a house, and raising a family. As my husband and I searched for a place to call home, we prioritized good public schools, being close to the metro, and a home in a diverse and welcoming community where we could walk to local stores and restaurants. And, a place we could afford a house.

We found our home and raised two great children, and for the last six years, I have served as the Mayor of our City. Over the years, I have witnessed a lot of changes in our community and the County overall. I first ran for Mayor because I saw housing becoming less affordable, recognized the need for changes in policing, and questioned whose voices got heard when decisions were being made. I am proud of the work we have accomplished in Takoma Park—the housing programs and policies; the support for small businesses especially during the pandemic; the changes we have made and continue to make to how we approach public safety; our efforts to become a sustainable community; and the work to center racial equity in our City’s decision-making.

As Mayor, I worked with members of the County Council and the State House to address the challenges of COVID19 and support residents and small businesses. Montgomery County faces the same challenges and opportunities that caused me to first run in Takoma Park. And, I am ready to bring real and common-sense solutions to county government so that it can address housing affordability, support local businesses, change the way we think about and approach public safety, and work to become a sustainable and inclusive community.

None of these things will be easy. It will take hard work and the continued support of this engaged and vibrant district. But, together we can build on our strengths and create a stronger, more equitable, and sustainable Montgomery County.

Q. Are you using Montgomery County public campaign financing? If not, why not? Are you accepting campaign contributions from corporate interests (such as property developers or their associates) and if so from whom? *

Yes, I am using public financing. I am not accepting campaign contribution from corporate interests.

Q. What have you done in recent years to benefit Montgomery County? If you are a current official, what civic engagement have you done? If you aren't, when have you participated via testimony, activism, task force, etc? *

During my time as Mayor, Takoma Park has moved to address issues such as housing affordability, sustainability, racial equity, and reimagining public safety. The work we have done in these areas is addressed in more detail in response to the questions below.

As Mayor, I have also worked with and supported a broad range of organizations, including:

- CASA, specifically upholding our Sanctuary City status and pushing legislation in Annapolis to stop local governments from enforcing federal immigration laws, working with other jurisdictions who want to restore voting rights to non-citizens since Takoma Park has had this in place since 1993, and advocating for immigrant rights in Annapolis. I have been endorsed by CASA in Action in this race for the County Council.
- Both National and MD ACLU, specifically on police reform efforts.
- Progressive Maryland, participated in membership meetings and supported work in Annapolis.
- NARAL Maryland, supported efforts in Annapolis
- IMPACT Silver Spring, work with staff to assist residents in Takoma Park especially Ethiopian immigrant families
- CHEER, work with staff to assist residents in Takoma Park
- Renters Alliance, advocated for Just Cause eviction and support other work in the County.
- Silver Spring Justice Coalition, police accountability in Montgomery County, especially legislation regarding Police Accountability Boards.

Prior to becoming Mayor, I served as the Executive Vice President of Advocates for Youth, an organization that works to empower young people to make informed and responsible decisions about their reproductive and sexual health while advocating for their rights. Before Advocates, I was a partner at a research and communications firm where she provided strategic advice to a range of progressive organizations, including the ACLU, teachers unions, Planned Parenthood, NARAL, NRDC, and LCV. For the last 7 years, I have been a principal in a firm that develops communications strategies and works to shape public opinion on issues related to reproductive rights, specifically access to abortion care.

Q. Please identify a few serious challenges facing Montgomery County that your office would address over the next two years, and what steps you would take. What obstacles do you anticipate and how can we overcome them? *

1) Mental Health: Top of the list is to put in place the resources and services to address both the short and long term mental health needs of our community. Mental health was a crisis before COVID-19 and it has only gotten worse, especially for young people, and we do not have the structures in place to address it. First, we need to address the immediate needs created by the crisis. One barrier is that lack of available mental health professionals. We need to expand the number of professionals in our communities and schools and this will require putting in place loan forgiveness programs and partnering with Montgomery College, UMD and other institutions of learning to address the shortage of mental health professionals. We also need to expand capacity to address emergency situations. Right now someone experiencing a mental health crisis will mostly likely interact with the police or possibly one of the few crisis intervention teams in the County, and then they are likely to spend two or three days waiting for a bed to open up to receive care. We need to do better and find ways for people to get the treatment they need faster.

Next, we need to look at the full spectrum of mental health and put in place programs and resources to ensure mental health promotion, crisis prevention, and treatment. For young people, we need resources in schools and the broader community to address promotion and prevention. Promotion is intervening to optimize positive mental health before a specific mental health problem has been identified and preventing is intervening to minimize mental health problems by addressing the underlying causes of these problems. All of this work must be done using an equity framework, because we know some communities have suffered generational trauma and disparities in accessing care. If elected, I look forward to working with members of the community to put in place the resources we need to address both the urgent and long term mental health needs of our community.

2) Housing: In addressing our housing crisis, it is important to acknowledge at the outset that safe, stable housing is a human right. All of our residents have the right to a safe, reliable and affordable place to call home. Too many children in our community start school at a disadvantage because this basic need has not been met.

There is no one solution to our affordable housing crisis. Rather, as a County we need to use a variety of tools to ensure that we create affordable and sustainable housing for all who live in the County. These tools include:

- Increased density and infill development around public transit
- Inclusionary zoning practices
- Rent stabilization and subsidies for affordable housing in transit and amenity rich areas
- Partnerships with nonprofits to develop affordable and middle housing
- Use of federal housing programs to increase affordable housing
- Down-payment assistance to help those looking to transition from renting to home ownership, particularly communities that have historically been disadvantaged and discriminated against because of immigration status, tenancy, age, ability, race or ethnicity, or economic status.

- Protections for tenants because ensuring residents have a safe and reliable home should not depend on whether they choose or can afford to buy a home

I started my tenure as Mayor in Takoma Park by hosting a community conversation on housing that brought together city staff, members of the community, and local and national housing experts. Based on what we learned from that conversation, I spearheaded the adoption of a Housing and Economic Development Strategic Plan and followed up with programs to address housing affordability. Through these programs, we have partnered with nonprofits to build missing middle housing and provided down payment assistance programs that have helped community members move from renting to home ownership. I also recognize that affordability is a regional issue and have worked as a member of the Board of the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments to set ambitious housing affordability goals for the DMV region.

3) Public Safety Reform: I have worked on public safety reform throughout my time on the City Council. I worked to end practices such as:

- The former police chief's practice of photographing young Black men for little to no reason; and
- The use of tinted windows on police vehicles.

In July of 2017 as we were beginning our search for a new police chief, I led the Council in establishing goals and priorities for the Department. These included but were not limited to the top three priorities.

- Promoting public safety while upholding the rights and dignity of all residents
- Adherence to the guardian, rather than warrior, model of policing
- Fostering a culture of transparency and accountability

In addition, in 2017 the Council also formally committed to forwarding racial equity and applying an equity framework to our decision making. Members of the Council and City staff including the police department have attended trainings on implementing racial equity into our decision making. And last year, we convened a TaskForce on Reimagining Public Safety which provided recommendations to the City which we are implementing and discussing. Specifically one area in which we have implemented changes is traffic stops. Over the last few years we have reduced the number of stops by declining to make stops for less serious violations and revamped the evaluation and reward system for police officers to promote community safety rather than quantity of enforcement. We have seen a drop in stops without reducing traffic safety, and in fact, we have seen a reduction in collisions during the same time period.

While we still have work to do in the City, I want to bring my experience to the County as we need to reimagine public safety and look at how we are handling policing in the County.

Q. Would you make any changes to the current County minimum wage law? *

There are two main issues I would like to address. First, we need to examine whether the minimum wage in the County is too low given the cost of living. Second, we need to revisit the minimum wage for tip workers to ensure that they are not left behind.

Q. What tax changes, if any, would you work to advance to make taxes more progressive in Montgomery County and/or to bring in additional revenue? *

One area we need to look at more is ensuring that we are getting full property tax amounts for certain commercial property, particularly when vacant. The current tax structure incentivizes commercial landowners to leave storefronts vacant while they seek higher rents.

We also need to examine tax credits for low- to moderate-income property owners. While there are tax credits available to residents, the credits are not well advertised, there are separate application forms for most, and they are confusing. All this means that those with greater incomes are more easily able to find ways to reduce taxes. In Takoma Park we have partnered with groups such as AARP for free tax preparation for seniors and need to make sure programs such as these are available throughout the county, especially in communities where they are most needed.

Finally, the County's ability to create a more progressive tax structure is limited by state law. We need to advocate in Annapolis so that we can adopt a progressive income tax in the County.

Q. What would you do to make more affordable housing available, particularly for low income residents and people of color? What are your views on rent stabilization? What additional renter's protections would you favor? *

As we address housing issues, it is important to acknowledge at the outset that safe, stable housing is a human right. All of our residents have the right to a safe, reliable and affordable place to call home. We also must recognize that to build a sustainable community, we need housing that doesn't rely on cars, but promotes alternative forms of transportation— walking, biking, and public transit.

There is no one solution to our affordable housing crisis. Rather, as a County we need to use a variety of tools to ensure that we create affordable and sustainable housing for all who live in the County. These tools include:

- Increased density and infill development around public transit and schools

- Inclusionary zoning practices
- Rent stabilization
- Subsidies for affordable housing in transit and amenity rich areas
- Partnerships with nonprofits to develop affordable and middle housing
- Use of federal housing programs to increase affordable housing
- Down-payment assistance to help those, particularly communities that have historically been disadvantaged and discriminated against, looking to transition from renting to home ownership
- Protections for tenants because ensuring residents have a safe and reliable home should not depend on whether they chose or can afford to buy a home

As noted above, I put forward a number of programs in the city including our Homestretch Down payment Assistance Program and partnerships with Habitat for Humanity. In particular, the down payment assistance program specifically addresses issues of generational wealth disparities.

As Mayor, I have supported and defended rent stabilization and worked on this issue with CASA. In particular, rent stabilization is beneficial to tenants and communities that are continually shunted from neighborhood to neighborhood by economic forces they often have no say in.

Research shows rent stabilization successful at reducing displacement of current tenants. According to the Urban Institute review, "If rent control is judged on its ability to promote stability for people in rent-controlled units, evidence has generally found it to be successful."

In addition, a well-designed rent control policy exists in tandem with eliminating exclusionary zoning laws, reducing the cost of housing construction, and providing universal vouchers to help low-income tenants afford their rent.

Q. What is your vision for transit in the county? How would you tackle traffic congestion and transit in the County in an equitable and environmentally sustainable manner? Do you support the Hogan proposal for managed variable toll lanes on an expanded American Legion Bridge and I-270 (and possibly in the future along 495 east of 270)? Please identify priority projects and funding mechanisms. *

New roads or added lanes are rarely needed. (That is separate from those very limited areas where some road widening may be important - safety improvements at an intersection, for example - or to accommodate the installation of busways and protected bikeways.) I do not support major new highways such as the Beltway/270 widening. The Takoma Park City Council adopted a resolution opposing this project. We need to move away from car-centric investments and look at other transportation options.

On transportation, as noted above, I support and move faster on public transit projects, including scaling up of Bus Rapid Transit, and focusing on decarbonizing vehicles through programs that make EVs more widely available and affordable. There is considerable need to integrate transportation planning with equity, housing and land use policy; for example, creating a system of FREE EV microtransit and ride sharing facilities connecting to metro, light rail (purple line), BRT and bus lines would help to solve the “last mile problem” so that all residents of the County have access to an integrated system of public transit. Also, land use and tax policy should go together to provide disincentives to sprawl. For example, the County should continue to enable its own employees to telework, encourage private employers to do so, and look at policies such as the federal Tax Cuts and Jobs Act (TCJA), which disallowed a tax deduction for qualified transportation fringe benefits businesses provide to their employees.

Q. How would you address policing and criminal justice? Which reforms (such as those in the Reimagining Public Safety Task Force recommendations) are the most important? What should be done to decrease racial disparities in criminal justice, decrease police violence, increase transparency, and maintain public safety? Would you support a reallocation of resources to support other crisis-management response approaches, such as medical and social services in lieu of police as a front-line response? What can the County Council do to move the needle in this area? *

Right now we rely too heavily on the police. Our public safety model does not adequately address the true causes of unsafe conditions in our communities; and has led to countless instances of violence against community members. Two specific areas where I would like to see changes are in how we approach mental health and traffic enforcement. The biggest hole is the lack of mental health care. Currently, the County only has one in-person mental health center with only four beds, and it's only available to those who have already reached the point of crisis. There are plans to build another facility, but we need to create more mental health centers across the county where residents can drop in to receive treatment-- and not just in emergencies. I would also put more counselors in schools. MCPS counselors are stretched far too thin to meet the mental health needs of our students. Providing more opportunities for one-on-one counseling would go a long way towards addressing the mental health crisis among young people, and this means also looking for ways to address the staff shortages by putting in place loan forgiveness programs for mental health professionals and pay parity in our schools for part-time counselors and educators.

Traffic stops are the most common form of interaction between MCPD and residents of Montgomery County: annually, more than 110,000 traffic stops have been reported in recent years. Because the vast majority of stops have been conducted by patrol officers in the course of their duties, rather than as part of a strategic effort to address safety, these stops are a major

component of discretionary policing: policing where officers individually decide who they stop and why. Traffic enforcement has become an end in itself, rather creating a system that strategically uses stops to ensure public safety.

In Takoma Park, we decided to reduce the number of traffic stops and focus our efforts more strategically on safety issues. We restructured incentives for officers to focus on safety rather than the number of stops. This has led to a significant reduction in the number of stops at a time when accidents declined. We should bring this same approach to the County.

I am also a strong supporter of the CAHOOTS model. We also need to set up a non-emergency mental health contact line to allow residents to consult with a mental health counselor. The MoCo Reimagining Public Safety Task Force estimated it would take 25 to 30 additional staff members added to the current Mobile Crisis Team to adequately cover the mental health needs in the county. The County Council should fund those positions as soon as possible. It would be a crucial step towards a more just and effective approach to public safety.

Q. How well has the Racial Equity and Social Justice Act worked to advance equity? Would you support extending the legislation to require the planning board to conduct Racial Equity and Social Justice analysis for its plans and amendments? How would you address a bill with a negative Racial Equity and Social Justice Impact statement? *

Racial equity and social justice absolutely need to be infused into all of the County's decision making. As Mayor of Takoma Park, in 2017, I led efforts with my colleagues to implement a racial equity framework for City decision making. I also served as the Co-Chair of the National League of Cities' Racial Equity and Leadership (REAL) Council, which assists Cities around the country to put in place and operationalize racial equity initiatives, and I currently Chair the TaskForce for the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments' Board to create a racial equity training for elected officials. A major part of implementing Takoma Park's racial equity framework was the addition of an impact statement on each of the City Council agenda items. We have learned a great deal (and are still learning) how best to incorporate racial equity impacts into our decision-making. In particular, having data to measure the impacts can be difficult especially for a city our size, but having the statements is a very valuable part of the decision-making process.

Before an agenda item or legislation comes before the County Council, we need to take into consideration the equity impacts. Legislation with a negative RESJ impact should not come to a vote. If we are truly committed to equity, it will be a part of the process in developing the legislation from the very start, and if there is a negative impact on equity that needs to be addressed before legislation is brought to the Council for consideration, and definitely before the legislation is voted on. I would support extending the legislation to the planning board.

Q. How would you ensure the racial and economic diversity of County commissions? How would you ensure more impacted communities are heard from in the commissions? *

The City of Takoma Park just undertook a multi-year examination of our committees and how to ensure they are racially and economically diverse. We have put in place a number of changes including providing stipends for members. I fully support the use of stipends for people who serve on committees. In addition, we have changed the application process so it is now two a year for all committees rather than throughout the year. The goal is to give people more of an opportunity to look at the range of opportunities to volunteer and request their 1st and 2nd choices. This gives the Council the opportunity to review who has applied and work to ensure individual committees are diverse.

Diversity is important, but we also need to make sure committees are inclusive and we have begun to put in place mechanism for that as well, including supporting new members, ability to borrow computers or other items that may be needed to serve, language assistance, and the ability to participate in person or remotely.

Most importantly, we need to listen to the members of our community to evaluate the barriers that may exist to serving on a committee and address those.

Q. As we address the pandemic, how would you engage racially and economically marginalized communities to co-create along with those communities policies that achieve an equitable County? *

I have proposed in the City and believe we also need county-wide a system of community navigators to assist in reaching and gathering feedback from communities that have been marginalized. The navigators themselves are people from the communities who in many ways have been doing this work already but they are not paid for it or provided the needed support.

In addition, we have amazing community organizations that the County needs to continue to support and build upon their work. Personally, in Takoma Park I have worked with CHEER and Impact Silver Spring to connect with residents in our City and hear directly from them their needs and how we work together to address them. We need to ensure these groups are supported by the County and can continue to do their work.

Also one thing that is still in the planning stages and I have wanted to do in the city is participatory budgeting. Participatory budgeting is a democratic process in which community members decide how to spend part of a public budget. It gives people real power over real money. Unfortunately, COVID-19 slowed the progress of a project but I am hopeful through the efforts of the Takoma Park Foundation we will be able to move forward. As a County Councilmember I would like to see the County put in place a participatory budgeting process.

Q. What do you believe the County and County government can do to promote sustainable and equitable additional economic growth and job opportunities? *

Matthew Desmond, in his book *Evicted: Poverty and Profit in the American City*, wrote: "It is hard to argue that housing is not a fundamental human need. Decent, affordable housing should be a basic right for everybody in this country. The reason is simple: without stable shelter, everything else falls apart...." Ensuring stable, affordable housing is an important piece of addressing economic inequality and one of my key priorities. Please see my answer above for more on housing and development.

Specifically, the actions I am most proud of during my time as Mayor is the adoption of a Housing and Economic Development Plan, the creation of the City's own housing reserve fund, and the implementation of programs to address housing affordability such as our down payment assistance program and partnerships with Habitat for Humanity to build affordable housing in our community. Over the last few years, we have been able to help families move from renting to home ownership in our community through the down payment assistance program. Homeownership is one way to help families build generational wealth and address economic inequalities. We have also seen new businesses open in the City and thankfully most of businesses were able to continue during COVID-19.

In addition, as Mayor, I have been a strong proponent of Delegate Wilkins' Just Cause Eviction/Stable Homes Bill. I have not only testified in Annapolis on the bill, but have advocated with the County Council and other municipal leaders to support the measures contained in the bill. All of these actions will add in equitable economic growth in our County.

In addition, I also supported the hiring of an Economic Development Manager in the City. This position has been able to secure state grants for façade improvements and public art projects along New Hampshire Avenue as well as partner with the Latino Economic Development Corporation to support businesses during COVID-19.

Finally, I am also glad to see the County is piloting Guaranteed Income. I have been involved with Mayors for Guaranteed Income and had been trying to do a pilot in Takoma Park. I am excited to see the County moving forward on a greater scale than we could do in the City. Programs like these proactively assist families rather than waiting for people to get behind in rent or other bills. A Guaranteed Income program linked to workforce development especially to help those who are underemployed is essential to addressing issues of economic inequality for the long term.

Q. Do you support the adoption of voting methods like ranked choice voting and/or approval voting and will you back legislation to give Montgomery County the autonomy to use either or both methods in future elections? *

Yes! We have RCV in Takoma Park and I have been an outspoken advocate for RCV, testifying in Annapolis as well as speaking on panels across Montgomery County.

Q. Do you support adoption of a public universal health care plan (at national or state level)? How should the county improve access to and affordability of healthcare beyond what the state or federal government does, in the short-run and long-run? *

Yes, I support public universal health care.

In terms of what the county can do, we have learned a great deal during the pandemic.

First, we need to fill the gaps. We need to help people access care by expanding and supporting community clinics and providing care in more convenient places for people. If we can do pop-up vaccine and testing clinics in schools and apartment buildings we should do it for flu shots and more. In addition, we need to provide more mobile dental and eye clinics, especially since this care is many times not covered even if people have insurance.

We also need to address barriers to access for programs people are eligible for now, such as confusion about eligibility, awareness of programs, fears about being considered a public charge, language and other barriers. In Takoma Park, I have witnessed first-hand the fear of accessing programs, especially under COVID. Families are concerned about accessing critical health care or applying for assistance because of living in mixed-status households or because they are worried that it will be used against them when they apply for citizenship. We have worked with non-profits and others to help as many as we can in the City and looked for ways to remove barriers to people accessing programs.

Q. Describe your vision for moving Montgomery County to a more environmentally sustainable posture, including, of course, to renewable energy and transitioning away from fossil fuels. What would be your office's top priority for combating climate change? What is your view of the County Executive's Climate Action Plan? Will you work to pass the Building Performance Standards in the Executive's legislation? What would your top 3 or 4 priorities be in moving the County towards a more environmentally sustainable future? Please include specifically what policies you would promote to achieve sustainability, and what can the County do in the next 4-5 years to make real progress on those goals. *

We need to focus on the areas that provide the biggest greenhouse gas bang for the cost, while also ensuring equity benefits. Our focus needs to be on reducing and generating:

1) We need to reduce our energy usage and waste. The main sectoral sources of greenhouse gas emissions are buildings and transportation (each accounting for more than 40% of the County's emissions):

- o Focus on existing buildings: Pass regulations and provide resources for implementing building energy performance standards, focused on multifamily and small commercial buildings to help residents who are most vulnerable; tackle how to move forward faster on electrification requirements and incentives for existing buildings.
- o Create the infrastructure for zero waste management: Move forward immediately with building our own composting facility in the County so that we can move beyond the current compost pilot, and upgrade our recycling plant. Both of these actions need to happen quickly so that we can move forward with implementing a plan for zero waste in the County.
- o Transportation: Support and move faster on public transit projects, including scaling up of Bus Rapid Transit, and focusing on decarbonizing vehicles through programs that make EVs more widely available and affordable. There is considerable need to integrate transportation planning with equity, housing and land use policy; for example, creating a system of FREE EV microtransit and ride sharing facilities connecting to metro, light rail (purple line), BRT and bus lines would help to solve the "last mile problem" so that all residents of the County have access to an integrated system of public transit. Also, land use and tax policy should go together to provide disincentives to sprawl. For example, the County should continue to enable its own employees to telework, encourage private employers to do so, and look at policies such as the federal Tax Cuts and Jobs Act (TCJA), which disallowed a tax deduction for qualified transportation fringe benefits businesses provide to their employees.

2) We need to generate clean energy:

- o We need more concrete plans for more generation of clean energy and increasing the amount of clean sources. Due to advocacy by the County Government, Mayors such as myself, environmental activists and our state delegation, the State has authorized the County to implement a 7-year pilot for Community Choice Energy (which was identified by the CAP as the most important thing that the County can do to cut our carbon emissions) but the Council will need to pass implementing legislation in early 2024 after the Maryland Public Service Commission sets the regulations for CCE (required by December 31, 2023). The County needs to greatly expand its generation of renewable energy, in part to ensure low cost options for clean energy under CCE, and we also need to do more to expand microgrids and community solar. MoCo should be generating more of its own renewable energy with emphasis on generation in the built environment through solar and geothermal generation coupled with battery storage. Generation of renewable energy must be coupled with support for energy efficiency such as home weatherization, with emphasis on assistance to low and moderate income residents, and the County needs to take advantage of state and federal funds for energy efficiency, as well as for generation of renewable energy.

Q. Finally, please review the national Our Revolution Platform, and indicate whether you support the platform in full or in part. Please be specific. The major tenets of the six-point platform are: 1) Defend Democracy: Protect Voting Rights & Get Money Out of Politics; 2) Medicare for All; 3) Climate Action: Keep Fossil Fuels in the Ground; 4) Fight for \$15 and a Union; 5) Criminal Justice Reform; 6) Protect Reproductive Rights. The platform is discussed in detail here: <https://ourrev.us/Platform2022> *

I support the entire platform and have worked as Mayor or in my other professional roles to advance these tenets. Please see my responses above for more details.

In addition, over the course of my professional life as a public opinion researcher and communications specialist I have worked on behalf of teachers unions. I have worked with the unions in California, Wisconsin, New Jersey, Illinois and Delaware battling efforts to undermine public education and public employee unions. I was part of a team that successfully undid then California Governor Schwarzenegger's plans to weaken the teachers' union and public education, and I also worked with the teachers when Wisconsin Governor Walker demonized educators and public employees. I've learned from my experiences working across the country that we need to make sure that our elected leaders continuously work to support public education as well as public unions.