



2022 Endorsement Questionnaire - Prince George's County Council
[All Responses Will be Made Public]

Candidate Name: Eric Olson
Contact Email: eric@electricolson.org
Council Seat Sought: District 3

1. How does your life experience qualify you for the office you seek?

I've spent my entire professional life working for – and making – progressive change locally and federally. This includes:

-Serving our community for 9 years on the College Park City Council, and 8 years on the Prince George's County Council, creating more walkable, transit-oriented communities, empowering our neighborhoods and serving as a community organizer, standing up to corruption, making government work better for residents, protecting green space and communities, supporting nonprofits that serve residents in need, building trails and sidewalks, standing with labor unions and working families, and advancing progressive change in our local community;

-Four years working for Bernie Sanders when he was in the House, where we cut corporate welfare, pushed for economic justice, improved infrastructure, protected the environment, and where I helped staff the Congressional Progressive Caucus;

-Leading the effort for election reforms including ranked choice voting as Deputy Director of Fairvote;

-Directing the national Sierra Club's "Healthy Communities Campaign" where I led the effort against sprawl, for smart growth, transit, and walkability, and for fixing aging infrastructure over building more highways;

My work is rooted in creating lasting progressive change and empowering our communities. I have been responsive to our entire diverse district, which is why

community leaders across District 3's neighborhoods overwhelmingly support my candidacy.

2. What have the primary sources of your campaign's fundraising been, both in this campaign and past campaigns?

The overwhelming majority of my contributions have come from individual District 3 donors and from labor unions.

3. In 2018, the Prince George's County Council approved a small-donor public financing program for Council and Executive races to come into effect for the 2026 election. As yet, the Fair Election Fund Commission has not been set up and no funding has been allocated to the program. Do you support the small donor public financing program? If elected to the Council, will you work to ensure the program is funded each year leading up to the full funding needed for the 2026 election?

I am a strong supporter of the small donor public financing program in Prince George's County, and I will work to ensure the program is funded so that it is fully funded for the 2026 election. I have long been a supporter of public financing, I worked on the issue as an aide to Bernie Sanders, and collaborated with leading public financing organizations when I worked in election reform professionally.

4. In 1992, through a citizen-driven referendum, a two-term limit was placed on council members which the council repeatedly attempted to repeal over the years and repeatedly failed. As a result of the addition of two at-large seats on the council in 2016, the two-term limit has been diluted with council members allowed to jump from at-large to district seats and back without limit. Do you think district membership on the council is significantly different from at-large membership? Would you support or oppose the reinstatement of strict two-term limits?

I support term limits in Prince George's County and have done so consistently. I signed the petition to correct the problem that was created by the addition of at-large seats that allows people to avoid the term limits by jumping back and forth between district and at-large seats and I support the reinstatement of two-term limits. The at-large seats are a problem generally due to the cost of running at-large, and who at-large members may become beholden to as a result. I suppose there are differences between serving in a district vs. at-large, particularly in that a district representative is likely to be closer to constituents and at-large members can ignore constituencies.

4. What is your position on the Maryland MAGLEV train proposal?

I strongly oppose the MAGLEV proposal. This massive project would tear apart neighborhoods and green space, pull ridership and investment from Amtrak and commuter rail, and serve only the wealthiest riders. It would bring no service or economic

benefit to Prince George's, and waste billions. We need investment in our communities, not a project like MAGLEV.

5. There is a great shortage of affordable housing in Prince George's County. What role can the County government have in creating policies that will provide affordable housing for residents at all income levels? How will you engage on this issue?

I will be prioritizing affordable housing as a County Councilmember. I will work to bring reputable affordable housing developers to Prince George's County, and will work to partner with them to build affordable housing, particularly near the Purple Line and transit. I support inclusionary zoning so that if public funds are in a project, the development must include a number of affordable units. I am also a strong supporter of housing trusts and other tools to increase affordability. I initiated an effort that is in its planning phase now in College Park to establish a housing trust.

6. As part of the Maryland Police Accountability Act of 2021 (HB670-2021), the Maryland General Assembly requires each county to set up a Police Accountability Board (PAB). Prince George's County Council must pass legislation to fulfill this State mandate.

- a. Do you support incorporating the functions of the existing Citizen Complaint Oversight Panel in the PAB?

Yes

- b. How would you ensure that the composition of the PAB reflects the community?

The Council and County Executive should have a strong role in appointing/confirming members and must prioritize that the PAB members reflect the full diversity of our community. We must insist on the outreach to find members who are not usually represented, and we should seek suggestions from community groups, including CASA and others who work closely in our communities.

- c. Do you support a PAB with subpoena powers and paid investigators to effectively review complaints of police misconduct filed by members of the public?

Yes

- d. Do you support adequate funding to staff the PAB to investigate the number of complaints filed, including budgeting for independent legal counsel?

Yes

7. The County Council approved a councilmanic district map that was very different from the map created by the independent Redistricting Commission appointed by the council. The map was found illegal by two separate levels of our judicial system. Please share your thoughts on the Council's map, public opposition to the map, and the judicial finding.

The map created and supported by six councilmembers targeted me in particular, as well as two other progressive candidates. It was a blatant gerrymander and reflected the worst of our county politics, damaging our county's reputation and threatening our local democracy. When the council sprung the secretive map in a last-minute maneuver, they revealed that they value politics over community. I was not about to let them get away with it, and vowed to fight it. Working with progressive groups like Our Revolution, we brought together community leaders tired of the political games. We launched a campaign to pressure the council to return to the independent commission map, ultimately to no avail. So, I brought together some civic leaders whose communities were impacted by the council's map, we brought a lawsuit, and ultimately prevailed in overturning the map at Prince George's Circuit Court and at the Court of Appeals, Maryland's highest court. The council's action was atrocious, but it made many people in the county see what happens more often quietly and behind closed doors. The Courts came to the correct decision (our case prevailed on the language that did not allow them to act by resolution rather than by bill and did not center on the injustice of the "gerrymander" itself).

8. The County has a massive backlog in school maintenance, renovation, replacement, and expansion, which former Board Chair and education stalwart, Dr. Alvin Thornton, has attributed in large part to 20 years of historical racial discrimination towards Prince George's students.

- a. The County's solution to part of this problem has been to engage in a Public-Private Partnership for the construction and maintenance of six middle schools - the first county in the entire country to engage in a P3 for school construction. Do you think that using private capital with significantly higher interest rates that places the burden on Prince George's taxpayers is a viable model to address historical racial discrimination or should the State make Prince George's schools whole through State funding.

I have long been a skeptic on P3 funding schemes for public projects. I would prefer for these projects to be funded through public funding. At minimum, whenever any financing is used, there needs to be full transparency, and the books need to be open to examination so that elected officials and the public know exactly what the costs are and what the full picture is.

- b. What is the solution to fixing the huge remaining backlog in school maintenance, renovation, replacement, and expansion?

We need more federal and state dollars to be invested in fixing this infrastructure. I will advocate for federal recovery money to be invested in our schools.

- c. What actions do you think the County should take to ensure that school capacity matches current and future demand?

We need to stop the sprawl development that contributes so much to the problem of overburdening our resources and not bringing in as much revenue as it costs. We need to do better planning and projecting for the future and ensure that we are both

getting the infrastructure dollars to renovate and build new capacity, or limit the development that contributes to overcrowded schools.

9. Should the Prince George's School Board be restored to a fully elected body? Why or why not?

I support a fully elected School Board because the people setting policy for our schools should be accountable to the public.

10. Through legislation and through zoning and land use decisions, the Council plays a decisive role in county planning, and that planning drives transportation demand, demand for services and facilities, environmental and public health impacts, greenhouse gas emissions, and many other impacts. The Zoning Ordinance Rewrite eliminates the requirement that developers file Conceptual Site Plans (CSPs) for certain kinds of projects. CSPs provide critical opportunities for public review and comment on land use proposals early in the development process. Will you commit to working to restore the requirement for CSPs as soon as possible?

I will commit to identifying the best method to ensure public review and comment on land use proposals early in the development process, which may be CSPs. My record reflects that I've always been a strong advocate for engaging communities in land use decisions. I have always insisted that communities be consulted when a development is proposed. CSPs have been an important part of the land use process.

11. The County Council often uses Zoning Text Amendment bills to rewrite the Zoning Ordinance on the fly and to help developers advance certain projects without going through the normal public review process. ZTAs weaken the Zoning Ordinance and undermine the public's right to know and to have a meaningful say on development proposals. Will you commit to working to end or severely curtail the use of ZTAs and to ensuring that:

- a. Any ZTA bill filed includes a list and map of all of the potentially affected properties, as well as analysis of the potential impacts on communities, the environment, agricultural lands, and demand on public services and facilities?

Yes, that seems reasonable to me.

- b. For each potentially affected property, the Council notifies all adjoining property owners, local community associations and watershed organizations, and local municipalities, by first-class mail and no less than 60 days prior to any public hearing on the ZTA?

Yes. That also sounds reasonable to me.

12. In May of 2021, the County Council unanimously passed CR-027-2021 in support of a single payer Medicare for All system at the federal level, becoming the first county in Maryland to support the federal legislative initiative. The resolution cited the increase in racial health disparities due to the pandemic that only a single-payer system could address. The resolution

also pointed out that Medicare for All “would reduce County spending on healthcare and enable local governments across our state to invest additional dollars into education, environmental protection, housing assistance, and other critical services.” Will you join the County Council in calling on our Congressional delegation to support and enact federal legislation for a single-payer system?

Yes. I am a strong supporter of Medicare for All and the single-payer system.