

Bridgette Johnson

County Council District E

Friends of Harford, Inc response to questions.

What improvements are needed for your district?

As the candidate running for County Council District E, I recognize the differences and challenges in my district as a whole. County Council District E is comprised of three communities within one district. Aberdeen is a municipality and can be described as suburban/urban with a dense population in certain areas. Churchville is considered to be rural/suburban/agricultural and less populated than other parts of the district. The Bel Air neighborhoods are suburban and densely populated in certain areas. The City of Aberdeen and the Rt. 40 Corridor in general is in need of reinvestment, rehabilitation and redevelopment. Quality affordable housing, efficient modes of transportation, retail, restaurant, entertainment and mixed -use development projects in and around Rt. 40 is desirable. The widening of MD 22 in Aberdeen needs to be extended to alleviate the traffic congestion in Churchville and Bel Air due to the number of commuters traveling from these areas to Aberdeen Proving Ground. Implementing SMART growth principles and sustainability practices will assist in striking a balance between redevelopment and new development in District E.

What legislation do you plan to introduce for your district? For the County? If you are an incumbent, what legislation have you introduced?

Support from four councilmembers is needed to pass legislation therefore requiring all councilmembers to be informed on matters affecting the entire county. I plan to introduce legislation modifying Tourism/Hotel Occupancy Tax – Harford County Bill No, 14-035 for the purpose of eliminating the “tourism and/or tourism related activities” as a qualifier for the Hotel Occupancy Tax Bill. The Hotel Occupancy Tax is levied on consumers irrespective to the reason as to why they are renting a room in a hotel. Harford County Bill No. 14-035 in conjunction with the Harford County tourism grants program administered through The Harford County Economic Development Advisory Board’s Tourism Activity Review Committee (TARC) awards funding to local non-profit organizations promoting cultural and historical activities, museums, eco-tourism and sports tourism. Since 2015, more than 30 organizations have received awards totaling more than \$4.5 million for tourism-related activities. Two of the three largest geographical contributors to the Hotel Occupancy Tax revenue received little to no funding for their communities based on the requirements of the existing legislation. Recognizing that areas of the county are not equal based on location, socio-economic status, historical districts, museums, sports complexes, agricultural facilities, water access and government representation the current requirements of the TARC grants places an undue burden on specific communities and forces them into a competitive disadvantage for funding.

I will work to ensure the communities located outside of the municipalities receive a dedicated percentage of the hotel tax collected in their respective areas to be used towards community and economic development improvement projects as well as grants to small businesses for operating and programmatic initiatives. The communities of Joppatowne/Joppa and particularly Edgewood and Riverside/Belcamp are home to a host of hotels and contribute greatly to the generation of the Hotel Occupancy Tax collected in Harford County. Additionally, Visit Harford is the official Destination Marketing Organization for Harford County but doesn't receive a designated percentage of the hotel tax on an annual basis. I will support a designated percentage of the hotel tax to be annually allocated to the Visit Harford organization.

I will work with the council to garner support for legislation to spur redevelopment projects.

Create progressive financial assistance packages for commercial/mixed-use projects located within the development envelope with an emphasis on areas below Interstate 95. The assistance package can be in the form of locally created tax credits to offset cost and spark redevelopment projects that will transform communities. The awarding of the local tax credits will be tied to new employment opportunities and the projects ability to expand the county's tax base.

Reduce or eliminate water hookup fees for a specified period of time to spur interest in redevelopment projects and create new jobs.

Reduce or eliminate sewer hookup fees for a specified period of time to spur interest in redevelopment projects and create new jobs.

Reduce or eliminate impact fees for a specified period of time to spur interest in new home building.

Continued support for the redevelopment of the Rt. 40 Corridor by implementing the recommendations from the Edgewood Small Area Plan. The Edgewood Small Area Plan is the first step in revitalizing a section of the Rt. 40 Corridor. As the Edgewood area stabilizes the momentum will spread to other areas of the corridor. Full support for the redevelopment of the county government owned land at Washington Court and Nuttal Avenue. Washington Court has great potential for a public, private partnership endeavor with the county government leveraging the property to ensure the viability of the project.

Transportation – Find a solution to the transportation challenges in and around the Harford Community College Campus specifically during peak hours. A dedicated funding stream other than state/federal funding is needed to address transportation and road improvement needs.

It's very important to note that above all else, the concerns and issues voiced by the residents of the district take precedence over all interests. The ability to listen and compromise in order to create good and effective legislation is one of my goals.

How would you include or engage more people to provide input to the Council's decisions?

As a councilmember, I would keep in contact with the community and encourage them to be civically engaged.

Would you be willing to explain your voting decisions on the dais for each bill you vote upon?

Yes. I'm willing to explain my vote to the public.

Would you support better ways to provide the public with user-friendly notification of decisions by DAC and the Zoning Board of Appeals? If so, how?

I believe Harford County Government does a good job with DAC and Zoning Board of Appeals notifications. The county website is easily accessible and explains the notification process. For residents without internet access or don't use the internet, notices are posted by signs, publications and certified mail. I would be willing to listen and implement other ideas pertaining to how to increase user-friendly notifications to the public.

Would you vote in favor of term limits for County Council members? Explain.

Yes, I would be in favor of limiting term limits to two terms for a total of eight years to be served on the County Council. It should be considered an honor to serve on the County Council and not a long-term career field.

How do you propose to solve the County's traffic problems in your district?

The City of Aberdeen/SHA is in the process of widening MD 22 which will help the flow of traffic headed towards and from Aberdeen Proving Ground. The flow on Rt40 (in Aberdeen) ebbs and flows during peak hours but appears to be sustainable for the amount of traffic and growth in the area at this time. The widening of MD22 in Aberdeen does nothing to alleviate traffic congestion on MD22 in Churchville/Bel Air. Harford County has limited options for public transportation including the Harford Transit LINK System. Carpooling and ride-sharing is always an option but it's based on consumer choice.

What parts of the zoning code do you feel need to be changed?

Relax the limitations on cottage housing in the residential zones and open to flexibility in the MO zone at I95/543.

Do you feel it's time for noise and lighting legislation in Harford County?

I believe it's time to engage the topic of excessive noise and light pollution in Harford County. Recommendations based on statistical data and research would determine the ability to garner support to create the legislation.

Do you approve of General Industrial (GI) zoning adjacent to residential communities or within a Village District? If your answer is 'No', how do you reconcile your disapproval with HarfordNEXT and recent Comprehensive Zoning Review decisions?

Yes. General Industrial (GI) zoning and residential communities can co-exist when design standards, buffers, landscaping and other development mitigation measures are implemented.

Do you agree with the reduction in the number of County inspections on construction sites when only 34 percent of contractors are in compliance with the Erosion and Sedimentation Control Ordinance?

Construction sites are inspected for a variety of reasons such as grading, plumbing, stormwater management and electrical to name a few. Decreasing the number of inspections on construction sites doesn't necessarily correlate to problems with erosion and sedimentation on the site. Additionally, it's unclear if the 34 percent of contractors not in compliance with the Erosion and Sedimentation Control Ordinance are contractors on construction sites with erosion and sedimentation control problems. Yes, I agree with a reduction in county inspections on construction sites if the inspections are not warranted.