

2010 Elections: Why Care?

Find Out Which Candidate Represents You Best For Montgomery County District 1 Seat At June 1 Forum in Town

Hear County Council member Roger Berliner and challenger Ilaya Hopkins—running to represent our community on the Montgomery County Council—in their first public debate, on Tuesday, June 1, 7 p.m., at the Lawton Community Center. The Democratic opponents will face off on important local issues, and answer your questions. Charles Duffy, host of Montgomery Municipal Cable TV's "Political Pulse," will moderate.

Come a half hour early and meet the candidates. Become informed before the primary elections on September 14, 2010.

Here's a preview of where the candidates stand on key questions. They were asked to respond in three sentences or less.

Purple Line: What do you support, and where should we go from here?

Berliner: .When I sought to represent the people of District 1 in 2006, I pledged to support a combined light rail/hiker biker trail. When this matter came before the Council, I joined all 8 of my colleagues on the Council, the County Executive, and the Planning Board in supporting this option. I have been and will continue to work closely with the Town of Chevy Chase Mitigation Committee and others to ensure that the project, if financed, is built in a manner that respects the neighborhood's most affected by the project.

Hopkins: I support designing and investing in a robust and integrated public transit system. I supported bus rapid transit on the master plan alignment including the trail because it offered lower cost, greater flexibility and a reduced footprint that addressed the community's concerns about noise and tree cover. I respect the selection of light rail as the preferred alternative and will work with the community to ensure the final design of the Purple Line addresses concerns of preserving recreational space and minimizing the impact on local neighborhoods and businesses.

What other solutions do you suggest for traffic congestion, as Walter Reed moves to the National Naval Medical Center in 2011?

Berliner: I believe traffic congestion represents one of the greatest threats to our quality of life. My response to this threat has been a comprehensive one, including: (1) I sponsored the current transportation test for development, a test that my predecessor had eliminated; (2) I successfully sponsored an amendment to the County Executive's budget savings plan to preserve Ride-On services – something I see as a 'core' government service; (3) my initiative to declare Rockville Pike/Wisconsin Avenue and Connecticut Avenue as "Sustainable Transportation Corridors", was enthusiastically supported by the Sierra Club, the Bethesda-Chevy Chase Chamber of Commerce, the Smart Growth Coalition; the City of Rockville; and the Coalition of Military Medical Center Neighbors; and (4) I sponsored an amendment that will give developers in White Flint an incentive to take cars off the road.

Hopkins: I've worked with the Navy to ensure that the new Walter Reed's transportation plan emphasizes a multi-modal transit approach including rail, bus, carpooling, bicycle and pedestrian access. I have been engaged in this process since 2006 and have worked with local communities to provide viable transportation solutions that meet broad community goals. I also recognize that BRAC and the half a million new patients and visitors will mean many more cars on our roadways and was instrumental in securing \$150 million in federal funding for local transportation improvements to alleviate the stress on our neighborhoods and communities.

What is your position on the proposed County growth policy in Bethesda/Chevy Chase and neighboring communities?

[Note: The revised White Flint Sector Plan was approved by the County Council on March 23. Plans for Chevy Chase Lake and Kensington are now being reviewed by the Montgomery County Planning Board and are expected to be considered by the County Council in the next few years.]

Berliner: We must strengthen our county's "growth policy" in order to ensure that we protect our established neighborhoods like Bethesda and Chevy Chase from overdevelopment, school overcrowding, and gridlock. When our growth policy was before the council last year, I sponsored and passed an even stronger school test than was recommended by the school system, our planning department, and a council committee. I have consistently supported the building moratorium threshold designed to protect our schools from overcrowding – and when a moratorium recently occurred in the BCC cluster, I encouraged my colleagues to fund the solutions needed to address the overcrowding in our schools – and we did.

Hopkins: The recent building moratorium demonstrated that growth policy can highlight when our community is being stressed, but the County Council did little to address those concerns both in terms of dealing with overcrowding in our schools and managing the growth our community is experiencing. County growth policy needs to be more responsive and longer term with key triggers that can allow for adaptation and adjustments as community needs change. However, as we have seen, even improved policies require active, engaged leadership to make the policy effective and bring meaningful solutions that will address community needs.

With a \$947 million Montgomery County shortfall, how would you close the budget gap?

[Note: The fiscal year 2011 budget will be adopted by the Council on May 27 and goes into effect on July 1, 2010.]

Berliner: Our current fiscal situation is literally without precedent. Over the long term, we must achieve greater efficiencies in our government by consolidating and restructuring to make our budget sustainable. In the short term, we face the most painful decisions imaginable. We will be asking our employees to make significant financial sacrifices; we will be laying employees off and furloughing them too; we will be cutting programs that are discretionary to the bone; and trying our best to preserve as much as we can of our absolutely essential core government functions such as public safety, schools, and our safety net services.

Hopkins: The historic nature of this deficit represents an unprecedented failure of the County Council to recognize oncoming fiscal realities and make hard choices to address a changing budget environment. We must focus on core services that are essential to our community and commit to delivering more with less, while examining programs and

services that are ineffective or better left to the private sector. Partnerships with non-profits such as Manna, a food bank, A Wider Circle, a social service provider and Bethesda Green, a sustainable living resource, are all excellent examples of how small investments can provide broad community benefits.

How do you propose increasing County revenues?

Berliner: We need to increase revenues to protect our excellent school system and public safety. The healthiest way for our county to do this is to increase the tax base. Arguably the most significant step the Council has taken in this regard is its approval of the White Flint Sector Plan, which is estimated to generate \$6-7 billion in additional revenues for the county. With the White Flint Sector plan, we are replacing acres of asphalt with a vibrant new walk-able community. We will also spur economic development by creating a favorable climate for bio-sciences, and capitalizing on our unique assets in the form of NIH, FDA, our existing bio-science companies, and our world renowned hospital and research organizations, such as Johns Hopkins.

Hopkins: County revenues dropped precipitously after the double impact of the housing crisis and the recession. We cannot allow our economy to stagnate. We must focus on helping the County's small businesses survive, keeping people employed and stabilizing the county's budget. We must attract new businesses and diversify our economy by making Montgomery County the destination for innovative businesses and the tax revenue and jobs they provide.

Roger Berliner, running for a second term, serves as lead member for energy and environment on the Council's Transportation, Infrastructure, Energy, and Environment Committee, and is a member of its Public Safety Committee. He is the Council representative to the County's Sustainability Working Group and Green Economic Task Force. Regionally, he serves on the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments Board of Directors and on COG's Climate, Energy, and Environment Policy Committee. For 20 years he has been president of Berliner Law PLLC, specializing in energy law. He received a law degree from McGeorge School of Law in Sacramento, California, and an undergraduate degree from Dartmouth College.
www.rogerberliner.com

Ilaya Hopkins, a past president of the East Bethesda Citizens Association, serves on the County Executive's Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) Implementation Committee that will relocate Walter Reed Army Medical Center to the Bethesda Naval Hospital campus. She is on the Western Montgomery County Citizens Advisory Board, where she co-chairs the Quality of Life Committee; and serves on the board of Bethesda Green, a public-private partnership to promote sustainable living practices. Hopkins was formerly an organizational development consultant and international cultural exchange program officer. She has a master's degree from Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies and an undergraduate degree from the University of Wisconsin-Madison.
www.ilayahopkins.com

Cosponsors for the forum are Citizens for a Better Bethesda, Chevy Chase Section 5, Chevy Chase West, East Bethesda, Edgemoor Citizens Association, Garrett Park, Martin's Additions, Rollingwood Citizens Association, Somerset, Town of Chevy Chase.