

County Council Candidate Statements

Candidates submitted the statements below in response to the following question: “If you choose not to sign [the pledge], a statement of your position on this issue would help inform our voter guide.”

Brandy Brooks (At-Large)

I strongly agree that federal, state, and local regulations regarding wireless facilities must be developed based on up-to-date research on the impacts of these facilities on public health, and that public officials must be honest and accountable around the factual basis for their decision-making. I commit to convening a working group of residents and other stakeholders who have the expertise to examine current regulations regarding wireless infrastructure using evidence-based public health, environmental, and racial equity and social justice perspectives in order to make recommendations regarding how current County policies should be amended or new policies adopted to ensure the health and well-being of all County residents. In line with my approach to community-led participatory policy-making, I commit to partnering with community members and stakeholders to advance regulatory improvements guided by the recommendations of this working group. As part of my overall commitment to public policy transparency and accountability, I commit to protecting the rights of County residents to be informed about and to question the basis for regulatory decisions regarding wireless infrastructure. Lastly, I strongly support County Council legislation being subject to both racial equity and social justice impact assessment and to environmental impact assessment, and I believe that the Council must hold itself accountable for effectively addressing issues arising from these assessments prior to passing legislation.

Chris Fiotes (R) (At-Large)

Thank you for your email and call. I will not be signing the pledge at this time. I believe this is a complex topic that requires in-depth review and understanding of the relevant facts. I look forward to engaging in a meaningful information exchange in the future.

Lenard Lieber (R) (At-Large)

I won't sign the pledge at this time as I believe it wrong to not be informed enough on a subject to commit one way or the other. I will say that the lowering of the proximity distance from 300 ft to 30 is troublesome to me, as is this the lack of ability to have hearings on cell towers and their placement.

I would welcome the opportunity to engage more on this, as well the Office of the People's Counsel and how it worked before it was ended.

Laurie-Anne Sayles (At-Large)

Thank you so much for contacting me and informing me of your past, present, and future concerns regarding cell towers.

You reached out on June 21st, asking me to respond to this issue and fully commit to doing multiple things by signing a pledge by June 25th. You then followed up on June 27th and June 28th.

The issue that you raise - cell towers - requires that I do in-depth research on the past law, amendments, and proposed future amendments regarding cell towers.

I would also like to hear from the various stakeholders in-depth, including your organization, to make a fully informed decision.

This is how I have approached my work at the Municipal level and how the County Council works.

That said, I can say that if I am elected to the County Council that I will prioritize the interests of Montgomery County residents on all issues that come before me. On this issue of cell phone towers, I will ask for environmental impact assessments to be done (I have a long record of protecting the environment) and ensure that cell towers do not violate County requirements.

Thank you again for allowing me to weigh in on this critical issue.

Marilyn Balcombe (D2)

I have not signed this pledge as I do not have the technical expertise to take a definitive position. While I understand the issue and have followed the public debate, as a Councilmember making these decisions, I would need to have a much fuller understanding before weighing in. If elected, I do pledge to meet with your coalition soon after the election. I also pledge to never make a decision on the Council without meeting with all stakeholders impacted by that decision.

Rob Wu (D3)

Thanks for reaching out on this. The City of Gaithersburg has been a leader in adopting reasonable regulations with respect to small cell deployment in public rights of way.

On the County Council, I would push for similar reasonable regulations that both permit appropriate location of small cell facilities and respect community input in their deployment, and other land use considerations in their deployment.

I am happy to discuss further my thoughts on this issue, as I am well versed in its complexities.

Al Carr (D4)

If elected to the Montgomery County Council, I am open to the idea of revisiting past zoning text amendments and permitting laws and practices concerning wireless facilities. I believe that our decisions should be data-driven, include robust community input and should be made in the best interest of the health and safety of the community. My approach is to understand what other jurisdictions have done and to seek out best practices. I am uncomfortable with the idea that wireless facilities may be placed 30 feet away from homes under current rules. My undergraduate degree is in electrical engineering and I worked in the "landline" side of the telecom industry for 20 years so I am well-positioned to explore this policy arena. As a 15-year State Delegate, I have worked to strengthen wired broadband service by writing legislation to prevent landlords and Comcast from colluding to limit tenants to inferior, overpriced monopoly broadband service. I have also worked to prevent WSSC's misguided attempt to waste ratepayer dollars by purchasing expensive smart meters. I have also worked to prevent Pepco's misguided attempt to waste money by investing in "smart" streetlights that tie into their advanced metering infrastructure wireless network. I would support the convening of a working group as

envisioned. I would be happy to support implementation of recommendations resulting from a robust working group process. I would support requiring proposals for wireless infrastructure to undergo environmental impact assessment. I would support policies that ensure compliance by the wireless industry with county rules. I also believe the county's ethics law needs to be strengthened.

Amy Ginsburg (D4)

I believe that increasing 5G through small cell towers will help Montgomery County prosper and increase our ability to attract businesses and new jobs, which are desperately needed. I firmly believe that we should be transparent and have robust public input, and I'm glad that there was a lengthy debate on this topic.

Troy Murtha (D4)

Providing up-to-date infrastructure, including digital infrastructure, is essential to promoting an informed citizenry, a vibrant economy, and a high-quality of life. However, none of those goals are achievable or sustainable without a healthy population and a stable ecosystem. As we continue to update our infrastructure, it is important that we do so in a healthy and environmentally conscious manner.

Among other things, this includes ensuring that regulations regarding health are regularly assessed, updated and observed; that equipment is monitored; and that transgressors, especially wireless providers, are held responsible. Progress is an amazing thing, but it must be balanced against the present needs of the citizenry.

Kate Stewart (D4)

Thank you. I very much want to sign the pledge but I must decline. I have worked on these issues as Mayor in Takoma Park. At my urging the city hired Mark Del Bianco to assist in the writing of our own ordinance on the placement of cell towers. I worked very closely with Mark over months and others in the county on this issue. I am very proud of the work we have done in the City. In addition I have spoken out against the County's ZTA and working with Councilmember Kovar have held meetings with County Councilmembers, wrote letters, and testified against the direction the county took on this issue. In addition, I advocated for our own Director of Public Works to be on the Tower Commission and there are a great deal of changes I would like to see made to the Commission. Finally, I have also advocated at the federal level on these issues and for an update on the standards that date back to the 1990s and signed on to amicus briefs for the court cases.

I must decline signing the pledge. I have thought about it for a number of days and without sitting down and talking to you all about what I am committing to I do not feel comfortable signing. I believe I am very much in alignment with what you all are advocating for and I hope we can work together as I have with many of you the last few years.

Thank you for your patience as I carefully considered your request.

John Zittrauer (D4)

Thank you for reaching out and following up with me regarding the pledge. I'm passing on signing it at this time, but I hope that isn't interpreted as hesitance to engage with the community regarding their

concerns about wireless infrastructure. When weighing the needs of local communities versus the community at large, I tend to defer to the latter. I'm definitely open to hearing more about opposition to projects while at the same time favoring the advancement of public needs. Please feel free to reach out with any more information that could help us make decisions that will benefit everyone.

Christopher Bolton (D5)

You have my word on 1907 I will make sure you get input if I win

William Montier (D5)

Signed pledge, with the following addendum:

Please find attached my signed pledge. I would like to know how this would affect the growth of businesses in the county.

Jeremiah Pope (D5)

Signed pledge, with the following addendum:

I am open to co-sponsoring and opposing the legislation but I need more time to review all studies and get a better understanding to the alternatives.

Vicki Vergagni (D6)

I prefer to have substantial knowledge on a specific topic, including both the pros and cons, before taking a position, Unfortunately, this is not an area in which I feel competent to take a position at this time -- even though you provided an excellent overview of the issue. I would prefer to hear from "the other side" on the validity of the issues that you raised before making a commitment.

I do feel comfortable agreeing with the contextual statements and with the proposed commitments except for the first two related to Zoning Text Amendments. I will be comfortable offering a position on those when I thoroughly understand what they are promoting.

Most disturbing to me is oversight absent from the Office of People's Counsel, This must be restored for the entire range of public policy issues to assure that the public (who most frequently do not have access to resources, including "insider" information) have a representative with knowledge and standing. Such a presence contributes to assuring that we are not run over by Councilmembers who often inappropriately side with corporate sponsors that financially benefit from such policies while harming the public at large.

Thank you for closely monitoring this significant County-wide change. It is those of you who are at the ready who assure that public policy is more resident-friendly, inclusive and equitable.

Paul Geller (D7)

I am with you. It concerns me greatly having cell towers throughout our neighborhoods in an endless push to have 5G cellular service everywhere. Despite assurances it is faster and better, I have yet to notice much of a difference...except the ruined aesthetic of neighborhoods harboring these devices. I agree that having these towers so close to homes is unwise as the effects of these units on people and the environment is unknown at best. The gusto with which some have been pushing this issue for years without engaging the community is something I loathe.

As your District 7 Councilmember, I will work with our legal counsel to examine our options and hopefully revisit the ZTAs that enabled this legislation, and reopen debate into the matter.

I will pursue this issue. As an advocate for our MCPS students for many years, and our community as a whole, it is important for everyone's voice to be heard.