

# Howard council candidates debate housing ideas

Sara Michael, The Examiner  
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## Howard County -

Howard County Council hopefuls agreed affordable housing is a critical issue, but differed on how they would approach the need.

“There’s no easy answer,” said Gina Ellrich, Republican candidate for the District 2 seat, adding that she would include residents and work within the current zoning process for solutions.

She criticized her opponent, incumbent Democrat Calvin Ball, for his introduction of a bill that would have allowed the county’s Housing Commission to partner with private investors to fund affordable housing.

The bill came under fire for resembling a zoning bill, and the council withdrew the measure this month.

Ball, who is running for re-election, said he was looking forward to a report due Oct. 31 by task force charged with examining the issues of affordable housing.

Mary Kay Sigaty, a Democrat running in District 4, proposed looking at all residential zoning categories to make sure each one includes affordable housing units.

She also said the council should revisit the percentage of each development that builders are required to set aside for affordable housing.

“We can do better than 10 or 15 percent,” she said.

Republican Donna Thewes in District 3 said the county should first define low- and moderate-income, so it can designate both levels of housing.

Currently, the county has only affordable housing for residents who make less than \$70,000.

She also said the housing should be distributed equally throughout the county, rather than just on Route 1.

Sigaty’s Republican challenger Tom D’Asto said he was concerned about the effect of affordable housing on downtown Columbia.

“I don’t want to use it as an excuse to overpopulate Columbia,” he said. “Too many problems evolve from subsidized housing.”

He said he wants to see enhancements to programs that support home ownership in Howard.

The County Council candidates spoke at a forum sponsored by the League of Women Voters, Howard County Commission for Women, Association of Community Services, Howard County

Citizens Association and Ellicott City Restoration Foundation at Howard Community College last week.

The other council candidates in attendance were Republican Tony Salazar and Democrat Courtney Watson, who are running for District 1; Democrat Jen Terrasa for District 3; and Republican Greg Fox and Democrat Don Dunn, who are competing for District 5.

*Examiner*