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From the Baltimore Sun

Land use a hot topic in council election

On Politics: Larry Carson

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County Council candidates don't get as much publicity as those running for county executive, but their views are important, especially for land use, since the council makes zoning law and, as the county zoning board, decides specific cases.



In fact, no topic appears more important to county voters, especially in older neighborhoods where it seems to residents that every odd lot and hillside is being developed for housing, despite county government figures showing a drastic reduction in homebuilding since the 1990s.

At least four of the five council members will be new to the job when they take office in December, and the new members will have a lot to learn.

At a candidates forum in [Ellicott City](#) last week, many council candidates expressed opposition to fast growth and congestion but displayed ignorance of the technical nuances in questions posed to them by a residents group headed by former council member Angela Beltram.

The group, Citizens for an Open Process for Everyone, collected more than 7,000 signatures to petition a contested omnibus zoning bill to the November ballot.

But most candidates were unfamiliar with the Traditional Neighborhood zoning concept in that Comp Lite bill, or with the legal problems inherent in the county's Office of Law representing various agencies in county government that could have different interests.

"This was a trick question," joked Republican candidate Tony Salazar, who is running in District 1, which comprises [Ellicott City](#) and Elkridge.

He was one of several candidates who knew Traditional Neighborhood zoning was a product of the Route 40 Task Force study intended to encourage a pedestrian-friendly mix of apartments, businesses and offices in older shopping centers along the highway in [Ellicott City](#).

Salazar also proposed creating a new county office to help neighborhood groups navigate the bureaucratic maze, and a way for residents to extract more development information from public records.

Adam Sachs, a Democrat running in District 2, comprising east Columbia and Jessup, pleased the anti-development crowd by saying he would favor separating the County Council from the zoning board.

Sachs and Beltram's group favor an appointed zoning authority, but they were a minority at the forum. Most candidates said they want zoning board members to be accountable to the voters.

"What I don't want to do is take away your right to vote against me," said candidate Courtney Watson, a Democrat also running in District 1.

She called for a review of the rules for allowing new homes in old neighborhoods - called "infill" - that she said was the most frequent complaint she's encountered while campaigning.

Republican Tom D'Asto, running in west Columbia's District 4, was in attack mode.

His friends, he said, have asked him, "Why ruin my reputation and be a politician?"

It's because he is "tired of the kind of people elected from District 4," who are "charlatans," he said, adding that he was referring to Councilman Ken Ulman and "his side-kick from the Columbia Association board."

Joshua Feldmark, a Democrat and former CA board member, drew a laugh when he got up and said, "I am apparently the charlatan running for County Council." Mary Kay Sigaty is the other Democrat in that race.

And although some candidates, such as District 5 Democrat Don Dunn and former county police Chief Wayne Livesay, a Republican also running in that western county district, talk about years of experience with county government helping to qualify them for the council job, Greg Fox, one of Livesay's two Republican opponents in District 5, wasn't one of them.

"None of us here are public officials," he said about those seated near him. "I think that's a good thing." Jim Adams is the other Republican in that race.

Schrader's stand

Two days after State Sen. Sandra B. Schrader formally announced her re-election campaign, she became the only Howard County Republican to break party ranks and vote for the BGE rate relief plan approved by the General Assembly early Thursday.

At her campaign announcement in Schooley Mill Park in Highland on Monday night, her Senate colleague Allan H. Kittleman, also a Republican, said Schrader's re-election is important.

"We need to have Sandy return to the Senate. She brings common sense to the Senate, and, unlike others, she has the unique ability to work with both Democrats and Republicans," he said.

Schrader repeated how much she loves the Senate job and criticized County Executive James N. Robey, her Democratic opponent in District 13, for raising taxes.

Hlass ready to run

David L. Hlass, 52, of Long Reach said he's planning a run for County Council as a Republican.

Hlass lost a bid by a 4-1 margin last year to return as his village's representative on the Columbia Association board of directors after the owners of the Long Reach Village Center banned him for allegedly harassing their employees - an allegation he denies.

He's running in District 2's GOP primary against Gina Ellrich, who has the backing of most party regulars. Councilman Calvin Ball and Adam Sachs are the Democratic candidates for the district, which includes east Columbia, Jessup and part of Elkridge.

Hlass is appealing his March 23 District Court conviction on second-degree assault and trespassing charges, according to court records. The case stemmed from a confrontation with his grown daughter at a county school and wasn't his fault, he said.

Why run for office again?

"People kept coming up to me and saying, 'Please David, we like results. You listen to the people.' My background brings a wealth of knowledge from around the world from my military travels," said the retired Army officer.

Ellrich welcomed Hlass to the race.

"In some ways, it's great. It will give voters a reason to take a closer look at the candidates," she said.

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