

**Responses to
Frederick County Charter Board Interview Questions
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1. Why should you be appointed to this board?

I have a long standing interest in the welfare of our community. I have served on a number of community organizational boards of directors. Through these experiences I have found that one of my strong suits is in working with those organizations to assure that a strong governance structure is developed so the entity can be run most effectively. I believe that in working within a group of other concerned citizens with diverse backgrounds, my skills and experience could benefit the effort to pursue a change in our form of government.

2. Describe what experience you have had in writing, revising, interpreting or following a charter (constitution or bylaws).

As noted above, I have worked with many local organizations: Frederick Memorial Hospital, The Community Foundation of Frederick County, Goodwill Industries of Monocacy Valley, and Frederick Mutual Insurance Company to name a few. In each case I have been active in establishing a governance committee that has been actively involved in reforming and redefining the role of the board and management. This has involved revising bylaws and sometimes charters.

In addition I have been an active observer of the role of government in our county for over 40 years, and take great interest in working to find a structure that clearly defines the role of government in such a way that will make the most effective use of the skills and talents of county employees.

3. Please share with us your vision of what the charter should look like.

My typical approach to addressing a challenge as grand as this one is to start with a basic concept/idea of how to improve the situation. Using the flyover analogy -- this would be at the 30,000 foot level. Then as the committee works together and gathers information the details will be hammered out as we zero in on a more precise definition.

To that end, I do believe that it is time for Frederick County to evolve from the "horse and buggy" form of governing by committee to a more traditional one with an elected executive who is responsible for administration and a elected council that focuses on legislative functions. Structured properly, it can be much more effective in delivering services to our community.

Do you support a countywide police force or the current form that we have now with a full service Sheriff's Office?

My attitude is that "if it ain't broke, don't fix it." We have been very fortunate to have a track record of electing high quality Sheriffs in Frederick County; so we can all be proud of what we have. That is not to say however that as the Charter Board digs into redeveloping a new county governmental structure, another option should not at least be put on the table for discussion and consideration.

4. The process of drafting a charter can be time consuming. Are you committed to devoting the time necessary? Can you commit to completing the task?

Yes and Yes

5. How do you operate in a group setting? Do you have experience in reaching consensus in groups?

In my work on the boards that I mentioned above, I believe that you will find that consensus building is one of my strong suits. While I have been known for my strong opinions at times, most of my focus in those cases has centered on assuring that the proper and transparent processes are in place. This I believe allows for resolutions to be achieved through becoming educated from gathered information. From there a free and open debate should take place.

I have chaired many boards and committees over the years, including the Frederick County's now defunct Capital Funding Committee back in the 1990's. I believe strongly that nothing will work without consensus. And in this case it not only requires the consensus of the Charter Writing Board, but more importantly the consensus of the community at large.

6. Once the charter is drafted, voters will need to be educated so they are prepared to vote on its passage in November 2012. Will you assist/participate in a voter education effort after the charter draft is completed?

Short answer is "Yes." However, I feel strongly that the voter education, engagement and outreach should begin now and throughout the entire 18 month period that this process may require. In the end the result must be a charter that is customized to the needs of our community rather than the ideas of nine appointed individuals.

7. There is a slight chance that the board appointees may be subject to a special election. Are you willing to undergo that process?

Reluctantly, yes.

8. What are some of the possible pitfalls from the charter form of government that could cause the waste of tax dollars? How can these pitfalls be avoided?

Any organizational structure will have pitfalls. In the end it comes down to the quality of the individuals who are elected to the offices.

If a majority of like-minded council members along with a county executive were voted in and they collectively chose to freely spend tax dollars without regard to off-setting revenues things could get out of control. In a charter where the county executive (county manager) was appointed by the council such a problem may be more likely to occur. To that end the situation could be worse than that of the current county commissioner format, in that the General Assembly has less control over charter governmental actions.

With that stated I do prefer the veto power of an elected county executive in the traditional charter form of government, as it does provide one additional "check" against the typical county commissioner majority rule.

Besides that I'm sure that there are several other ideas that can be required to hold our elected official accountable, such as requiring a balanced budget, setting debt ceilings, and establishing detailed and regular reporting requirements to the public. It will be a priority of mine to seek out additional ideas in this arena.

9. How much power should a county executive have versus a council member?

The local model that I am most aware of is that of the City of Frederick where there is a clear distinction between the executive and legislative duties of the two branches. That structure seems to work pretty well. While I have already stated that I favor an elected county executive with veto power, beyond that I remain open to the degree that either branch should have over of such things as the powers of appointment, spending, etc. In addition we should not forget what level of powers that the charter may choose to remain vested in the Maryland General Assembly.

10. How do you think transparency and public involvement can best be maintained?

I assume here that you are referring to the transparency and public involvement in the process of writing a charter for Frederick County. As stated earlier, I feel strongly that this must be an extremely open process that focuses on education and feedback throughout the allotted 18 month process. It will be important for the appointed board to establish a program to reach out through various media outlets and geographical locations to accomplish this. While it may not be appropriate to make every single meeting open or broadcast in a live format, in those cases detailed minutes should promptly be made available to the public and then provide an opportunity for feedback along the way.

11. Describe the types of powers that you would propose be vested in the county executive and a county council in an ideal charter government. What checks and balances would you propose?

I touched on this in my answer to question 9. As stated the structure that was established in the City municipal charter of 1951 is one model that should be referenced. In this case the aldermen (county council) has authority over offices, departments and agencies and can fix salaries, as well as legislate other ordinances ... all of which require approval by the mayor (county executive). This in and of itself provides a good check and balance of the governmental actions. In addition the county executive should have the power to be the chief administrator (CEO) of the county operations and employees, as well as establish a budget.

While I don't necessarily advocate the idea, the role of government could be more limited in scope than what we have now. And if there was a desire to expand a referendum would be required.

There is a vast resource of consultants and proven concepts that can be available to the charter board, so while it is probably not necessary to reinvent the wheel to find new ideas for checks and balances within a new structure, it is always good to think out of the box for answers that are within the limitations provided by Article 25A of the annotated Code of Maryland.

There may also be some ideas that could come from the charter that was proposed from the 1991 charter writing board and other charter counties within Maryland.

12. How many members would you propose be on the county council? Would you propose that some or all of the council be elected from distinct districts?

I like the direction that the 1991 charter board took with having 5 council members from distinct districts of equal population; however I do also like the idea of at least one at large member to the council. Based upon my observations of our county government over the years, there have been many times that the Board of County Commissioners has not had at least one elected member who was a resident of the City of Frederick. This alone, I believe has contributed to the historic lack of compatibility between county and municipal governments within our community.