



## 2014 Frederick County Council Candidate Questionnaire

CANDIDATE: \_\_Linda Norris\_\_

OFFICE (DISTRICT OR AT LARGE): At Large

CAMPAIGN ADDRESS: \_9227 Baltimore National Pike, Middletown MD 21769

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CAMPAIGN TREASURER Tina Seymour

*I confirm that the responses provided here are my official positions in seeking local office, and I understand that FCTA reserves the right to share my responses with members and interested parties.*

CANDIDATE SIGNATURE: \_\_Linda M. Norris\_\_ DATE SUBMITTED: \_3/6/2014\_

*Candidates: In order to be considered for a recommendation, you must respond to each of the questions. Clarifications, explanations, and other information may be attached, but please be certain to indicate clearly the questions(s) to which you refer. Please return your completed and signed questionnaire to **the Frederick County Teachers Association**.*

## Frederick County Council Candidate Biography

### Education:

High School Diploma, Thomas Stone HS Waldorf MD  
BA Journalism, University of Maryland, College Park

### Pertinent Employment History:

Marketing Manager, US Composting Council (current)  
Owner, NW Communications (2010-current)  
Communications Director, US Division, Canam Steel Corporation  
Recycling Director, Frederick County Office of Recycling  
Public Information Officer, Frederick County Government  
Beat Reporter (local government, law enforcement), Frederick News-Post  
Legislative Assistant, US Congressman George Wortley  
Potsdam Bureau Reporter, Watertown Daily Times

RESUME ATTACHED

### Previous Political Offices:

None; ran in 2010 (endorsed by FCTA)

### Organizations/Community Involvement:

League of Women Voters  
Marching Band Uniform Room Coordinator, Gov TJHS  
Frederick County Chamber of Commerce, Public Policy Committee  
Middletown Chamber of Commerce, Board of Directors  
Lector, Holy Family Catholic Community  
Member, Lewistown Volunteer Fire Department  
Member, Maryland Recycling Network

### PAST:

Girl Scout Leader, Brownie, Junior Cadette and Senior Levels  
Catechism Instructor and Confirmation Adviser, St. Peter the Apostle Church  
Member, Frederick County Parks & Recreation Commission

1. What is your vision for the future of Frederick County Public Schools? As a member of the County Council how would you support this vision?

Frederick County Public Schools is a place where every student, regardless of race, handicap, language or nationality, is welcomed for an education that will contribute to the future of our community, our state and our country.

To achieve this, we must accommodate---to the letter of the law as well as the spirit of the law--- federal and state requirements for curriculum and accommodations that address the needs of all students. It is the function of the County Government, which collects and determines funding for these needs, to secure sufficient funding for the Board of Education and Superintendent to accomplish these goals.

2. For the last five years the county government has funded the school system at Maintenance of Effort (MOE) levels even in years the county revenues increased. MOE is the lowest level of county education funding allowed by law and does not take into account inflation, unfunded mandates or other increased costs to education. FCTA has been very clear that MOE funding over this extended period is not adequate to meet the needs of our students. Do you believe MOE funding for Frederick County Public Schools is sufficient or do you think additional funding is necessary? Explain.

MOE funding is a floor and not a ceiling. As revenues rise, so as well should funding for our school system's operational budget. FCPS's 2015 budget, for example, has analyzed many of the needs that have fallen behind during the recessionary years when all the stakeholders made sacrifices to work within MOE; county financial decisions should focus on doing everything possible to fund the FCPS budget in the coming years to restore sacrifices. While it is obvious this must be balanced with sacrifices made to General Fund priorities that are also in need of restoration, they must all be on the table as equal choices.

3. One of the duties of the County Council is to approve the county budget. In FY14, 47% of county funds were allocated to the Board of Education. How will you determine the appropriate amount of funding for the Board of Education? Do you think the current County Commissioners have adequately funded education? Explain

Percentage measurements as stated, as a guideline for equity and progress, are only that: guidelines, and are false measures of whether we are under- or over-funding our schools. From year to year, economic cycles, new state, federal and local mandates, and other factors will change the needs in both the county's General Fund and the Frederick County Public Schools' budget. Some years, factors such as the state's shrinking funding of teacher retirements, operational funding for a new school, or a need to catch up from a recessionary year may require

expenditures of more than 50% of the county budget; and vice versa, when coffers are lean (as they have been) a drop below 50% for school spending due to agreed-to concessions by school system managers and unions may take place. I would rely on the regular communication described in answers to other questions in this document, as well as the professional judgment of FCPS administrators and the Board of Education, to deliver a responsible document to the County Executive for inclusion in the budget. If the executive fails to adequately fund the submitted school budget and the reasons are not defensible to a majority of the Council, it would be the responsibility of the Council to reject the budget and send the Executive back to the table to discuss an adjusted budget with FCPS.

In the current BOCC's first two years, facing a severe decline in revenues and revenue projections, FCPS worked within lean budgets to accommodate an MOE-only budget. Yet as projections indicated that county revenues were increasing, it was the responsibility of the BOCC to apply increases to the school budget in years three or four, and their failure, so far, to do so has left the system in severe catchup mode.

4. FCTA supports a revenue structure that will provide a predictable, reliable and stable source of sustained funding for education. FCTA opposes tax cuts or limitations that directly or indirectly have an adverse effect on public education. The current County Commissioners have called for tax cuts and rebates while claiming the county faced structural deficits and they imposed flat funding for public education. What is your view of the current local tax structure? What, if any, changes would you advocate?

Fortunately, the ability to utilize the excise tax still exists, even though it has been zeroed out. The excise tax and potential reallocation of the recordation tax can be tools to fund both general fund and school system needs. Additionally, the integrity of the Adequate Public Facilities Ordinance as a planning tool to ensure a region's readiness for additional students must be restored. The School Mitigation Fee, while an interesting new tool to spur needed rehabilitation of older schools that do not benefit from impact fees, is not a substitute for an enforced APFO.

5. Recruiting and retaining high-quality employees is essential to improved student achievement. It is made more difficult in Frederick County by our proximity to higher paying school systems and the high cost of owning a home in Frederick. What would you do to help the school system recruit new staff and keep experienced staff in Frederick County?

So many of the answers to these questions are interdependent; it is part of the challenge of governing to find answers that, in addressing one issue, do not throw another out of kilter. An example is impact fees; while they are a straightforward answer to generating revenue for new school capacity in growing areas, high impact fees are also one of the primary drivers of high-cost housing in Frederick County. Additionally, it continues to be incumbent on the Planning Commission and County Council to balance the types of housing stock in the county to address affordable housing yet generate adequate tax revenue by having adult communities that contribute more than they remove from the tax base. Continuously updating and adhering to our Comprehensive Land Use plan is key to a good balance of residential, commercial and Industrial and agricultural land, which contributes to tax revenue at less cost of services.

Adequate compensation is key as well; our starting salaries at all levels must be funded competitively with surrounding jurisdictions and the county budget must respect efforts made by FCPS, the BoE and education unions to design a compensation package that attracts and retains good staff.

6. In spite of an accelerated building schedule, many of our schools remain overcrowded. Enrollment data indicates 13 of the county's 66 public schools exceed full capacity. This includes; Centerville Elementary, at 140 percent; Hillcrest Elementary, 130 percent; Urbana Middle, 128 percent; Tuscarora Elementary, 120 percent; Yellow Springs Elementary, 112 percent; North Frederick Elementary and Whittier Elementary, 111 percent; Waverley Elementary, 109 percent; Urbana Elementary, 108 percent; Oakdale Middle, 105 percent; Deer Crossing and New Market Elementary, 104 percent; and Monocacy Elementary, 102 percent (source: Frederick News Post, October 7, 2013).

What is your plan to provide adequate space for all Frederick's school children? What would you do to alleviate overcrowding in schools, particularly in the city and in the Urbana area? What role does the county's Adequate Public Facilities Ordinance play in mitigating/ preventing overcrowding of schools?

As stated above in question #4, a diversity of tools from the county's "revenue generation" toolbox should be consistently available and rebalanced each year to attempt the most equitable solution to overcrowded schools. I also believe there are "out of the box" solutions that could be the outcome of transparent, honest and open discussions between county and school officials at staff level that might reward FCPS for creative ways of addressing overcrowding solutions with budgetary tradeoffs; for example, if a short-term "bump" in overcapacity can be addressed without having to create new capital spending, the savings that accrue should be allotted to FCPS for use in another place in the budget.

7. Inequities in technology, space and functionality exist between new and newly renovated buildings versus older buildings. How do you see the need to renovate older schools fitting into the Capital Improvement Plan? How should the renovation needs of older buildings be prioritized?

Pitting growing communities with new-school capacity needs against established communities with aging infrastructure is not good policy or politics and does not lead to community engagement or solutions that bubble up as a result of creativity! The discussions of the Growth Task Force about equitable ways to spread infrastructure needs so that revenue is generated not only from first time homeowners but from repeated home sales is a wonderful step, and I look forward also to the Impact Fee study to assist in finding an equitable division of "fundraising" for school construction and rehabilitation, which must be placed on equal footing.

8. FCTA opposes any public funding of private schools, including but not limited to, vouchers to cover private school tuition. What is your position on vouchers and other forms of public funding for private or home schooling?

In an environment where public school funding is precious and increasingly difficult to secure at adequate levels, we must be very cautious about any sources that reduce that funding pool. If a charter school can address a need that the public school system is unable to address, it should be considered, but I am very concerned about equity in admissions to the school, as well as accountability to FCPS standards (local and based on federal/state mandates) and budget requirements. Vouchers for private schools in the form of in-kind items such as bus transportation where feasible are one thing; but are unfair as a simple blank check handed to folks to shop for private/home schooling without accountability for results.

9. FCTA and the Frederick Association of School Support Employees (FASSE) oppose the outsourcing and privatization of jobs currently done by the dedicated education support professionals of FCPS. Do you think it is appropriate for the school system to privatize aspects of their operations? Under what circumstances, if any, would you support privatizing or outsourcing work currently done by FCPS staff?

Privatization is always a difficult and emotional issue, and needs to be a management tool that is on the table to measure performance and, if necessary, obtain more cost effective performance, by any manager. However, it is not the job of the Frederick County Council to either mandate or forbid privatization in the school system without the risk of micromanaging and overstepping authority; I see that decision and analysis as a dialogue and negotiation between the elected school board, FCPS administration and affected employee representatives.

10. FCTA supports efforts to protect and enhance the state's collective bargaining laws and opposes "right to work" laws which restrict freedom of association and weaken organized labor in Maryland. Do you support public education employees' right to bargain collectively? Currently, county employees do not have collective bargaining rights. Do you support county employees' right to bargain collectively?

Unionization is normally a result of unfair practices by employers and as such, employees have every right to organize to overcome inequities by unresponsive employers. I believe employee groups should take every opportunity to discuss inequities and challenges with managers; in the event that this course of action meets no response or honest discussion, it is our right as Americans to organize and advocate for change. I plan to advocate for respectful and honorable treatment of county employees, which done well can forestall the contentious situation that sometimes arises when contracts are at issue.

11. As a member of the County Council, how will you work with the elected Board of Education, particularly regarding issues related to funding the BOE capital and operating budgets?

Dialogue, communication and education! The BOE/BOCC meetings that have been ongoing should be continued to keep each body informed of the needs, constraints and funding challenges of the other. It will be especially important under Charter Government, because the Council cannot increase budgets, but only reject those that are insufficient. In the event an Executive-proposed budget does not dedicate sufficient funds to FCPS, an honest and transparent dialogue about the needs of our school system is necessary to obtain a majority on the council if it becomes necessary to reject an insufficient budget. Additionally, it is not job of the County Executive or County Council to be part of contract negotiations between our duly elected school board, superintendent and union organizations and I would adamantly oppose any move to legislate that in any way.

12. As a member of the County Council, how will you work with FCTA, FASSE and the Frederick County Administrators and Supervisors Association (FCASA) so that the experience, knowledge and expertise of professional educators will help inform your decisions on issues related to public education?

These organizations should regularly provide their positions to both Board of Education members and County Councilmembers; if not, upon receiving the superintendents budget I would reach out to each organization to request its views on the budget presented. I also plan throughout the year to touch base with each organization, either by attending an appropriate event where the council/public is invited or by maintaining a dialogue with a member of the organization's board throughout the year. Additionally, folks in these groups will be excellent resources for school/county issues that come up outside budget time, and I intend to utilize the contacts I make throughout this election process to inform myself upon issues throughout the year.

Since the County Council is a new (and 7-member!) "animal", it would also be helpful to have some dialogue with leadership of the organizations, as well as the FCPS administration and Board of Education, about how such requests for information should be handled; I for one like to just pick up the phone and call people for background information, but with 7 councilmembers, I could see this privilege easily overtaking the time constraints of these staff members to do their jobs. A good balance between providing information to the Council and respecting the hierarchy and workloads of school staff will be needed.

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## **HIGHLIGHTS**

- Corporate, non-profit and government communicator
- Deep knowledge of marketing private and public programs
- Thorough understanding of media operations
- Current with new media and electronic public relations/marketing

## **SKILLS**

- Software: Excel, Microsoft Word, PowerPoint, Microsoft Access
- Member, Frederick County Chamber of Commerce
- French speaker having travelled and worked in Quebec

## **PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE**

Principal, NW Communications, 2010-Present

Directed public relations practice focusing on media relations, messaging, marketing plans, social media, and copywriting.

Communications Director, 1999-2009, Canam Steel Corporation, Point of Rocks, MD

Managed marketing communications for four plants, facilities and sales offices of the U.S. division of a major North American manufacturer, including internal communications strategy for 1,000 U.S. employees (engagement campaigns, newsletters, Intranet etc.); external communications (media, community relations, product marketing, tradeshow, brochures). Received International Association of Business Communicators Silver Inkwell Award for product marketing campaign.

Recycling Program Manager, 1990-1999, Frederick County Recycling Office, Frederick, MD

Managed a program providing recycling services, marketing and education to residents and businesses; overseeing a \$1.5 million budget including service contract, advertising, grants.

Public Information Officer, 1989-90, Frederick County Government, Frederick, MD

Coordinated press information, special programs, publicity. Developed volunteer programs engaging 200 people, annual report circulating to 40,000 readers, county newsletter reaching 1,000 employees, weekly cable television programming.

Reporter, 1986-89, Frederick News-Post, Frederick, MD

Covered County/City Governments, police/general assignment stories, including investigative reports.

## **EDUCATION**

University of Maryland, College Park, MD, Bachelor of Science Degree, Journalism, Government and Politics minor.

University of Maryland, Baltimore, MD, graduate coursework, Urban Planning; coursework in business communications, International Association of Business Communicators.

## **AWARDS**

IABC Silver Inkwell Award of Excellence, 2006

## **COMMUNITY WORK**

- Emerge Maryland, Advisory Board, 2012
- Maryland Shakespeare Festival, Trustee, past marketing chair and fundraising chair, 2011-2012
- Gov. Thomas Johnson High School Band Boosters, Uniform Chair, 2012-13
- Webmaster, Lewistown Co. 22 VFD Website, 2010-present
- Maryland Recyclers Coalition, Board Member, 1996-99
- Frederick County Parks and Recreation Commission, Vice Chair and Member, 1995-2000
- Leader/co-leader, Girl Scouts of America, Senior, Cadettes, Juniors and Brownies; 1987-present
- Monocacy River Conservancy & Cleanup Campaign, 1990-93
- Literacy Council Tutor, 1985-87