



## 2014 Frederick County Council Candidate Questionnaire

CANDIDATE: M.C. Keegan-Ayer

OFFICE (DISTRICT OR AT LARGE): District 3

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CAMPAIGN TREASURER : Don Butt, Jr,

*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: \_\_\_\_\_ DATE SUBMITTED: \_\_\_\_\_

*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: B.A. in Education, Bridgewater College, Bridgewater, VA

### Pertinent Employment History:

- 2 years as 1<sup>st</sup> grade teacher for the Archdiocese of Washington, D.C.
- Spent 10 years working on Capitol Hill
- 4 years working as a staff assistant for Congressman Don Edward (D-CA)
- 3 years working as Legislative Director for Congressman Nicholas Mavroules (D-MA)
- 3 years working as a lobbyist for the Independent Insurance Agents of America
- 3 years working as staffer in the campaign office of Congresswoman Beverly Byron (D-MD)

### Previous Political Offices: n/a

#### Organizations/Community Involvement:

- Taught Summer to Summer religious education classes for St. John's the Evangelist Church
- PTA of Waverley Elementary School (County Council Rep 7 years)
- PTA of West Frederick Middle School (President 2 years, County Council Rep 3 years)
- PTA of Frederick High School (President 3 years, County Council Rep 9 years)
- PTA Council of Frederick County, Local Legislative Chair, (2 years) then as the Local and State Legislative Chair (3 year) , finally as the 2<sup>nd</sup> V.P. (3 years, acting 1 year)

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?

My vision would be to allocate the money necessary to allow the BOE to begin to invest in the system and in the programs that will provide the additional educational opportunities for all our students to help them better compete in this global economy. In addition, I envision a cultural change so that FCPS employees are no longer made to be the "scape goats" for all the budget woes that the county has been experiencing, so that they are instead treated as the hard-working professionals that they are. And that we then pay them accordingly.

Also, I envision allowing the BOE the flexibility to make decisions and invest in programs that will help maintain the status of FCPS as a top-notch school system – one of the premier systems in the entire nation. I would like to see FCPS being able to not only keep up with the trends of a 21<sup>st</sup> century education, but to become a trendsetter in Maryland, able to try new and innovative approaches to education.

Finally, I envision having top-of-the-line, dedicated employees, from our fabulous support staff, to our wonderful teachers and administrators who will wake up each day, passionate about their jobs and energized about going to work. This is what I envision for FCPS under a new charter government, with newly elected leaders.

I would support this by providing the BOE with the funding necessary to adjust for inflationary factors. I support the Council and the Executive allocating the amount of money necessary to support the educational programs currently in place and also working with the BOE to find innovative ways to expand programs to enable the schools system to remain one of the top systems in the country.

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 the floor, not the ceiling for funding. MOE funding does nothing to address the investments that the BOE must make in our school system in order to remain competitive with other systems and more importantly to provide our students with the education and the opportunities to allow them to effectively compete in the world today. I have spoken on behalf of the BOE budget for the past 15 plus years. While I believe everyone can appreciate (even though they may not agree with) the necessity of MOE funding during the years of severely depressed revenues for the county, those years are over. The BOCC has continued to fund at MOE levels despite having enough money to provide for salary increases for their own employees. Yet apparently they can find nothing to allow for similar increases for FCPS staff. This is just blatantly unfair. I have spoken out against this practice, not just at the public hearing on the budget but at various other venues in order to raise public awareness of this partiality. The public needs to become cognizant that decisions being made by this Board of County Commissioners are actually having an adverse impact on our students and their education.

Additional money is necessary to fund our school system, but it must be spent prudently. It is not just needed to cover the increase in costs of things like oil to heat our buildings and diesel to run the buses. It is needed to cover things like additional counselors to deal with the myriad of issues our students bring to school with them, which need to be addressed before teachers can even begin to teach. When we have ¼ of our students living in poverty, when we have over 600 of our students who are considered homeless (regardless of whose definition one is using), the school system has a great many needs beyond simply educating our children. With each new need comes another layer of assistance or remediation required from the schools, and each of these comes with a cost. By providing

only MOE funding, the county is merely treading water, and this is no longer acceptable.

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

At one time, there were discussions about splitting the county budget 50/50 – with 50% of the county funds going to the BOE and the other 50% funding the rest of the county expenses. It may be time to revisit that conversation at least from a theoretical perspective. It would give a level of certainty to the BOE which might allow them to better plan. The concern that I have with this proposal is that when revenues fall extremely short of projections, there may have to be adjustments made. This could impact the BOE's ability to continue to fund all programs as they had the previous year. But we know the BOE cannot just stop certain programs because the money is no longer available without having a detrimental effect on the students. It is the same problem we have with using one-time money to fund on-going programs.

I do not feel the BOCC has adequately funded education. MOE funding has no inflation factor built into it. When we continue funding at this base level, we are in fact, falling farther and farther behind. If one takes into account inflationary factors, current MOE funding is in essence only equivalent to 2008 fiscal year funding levels, yet we are attempting to pay 2014 bills. That is a 6 year funding gap.

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?

The current BOCC has reduced or eliminated many of the taxes and fees charged to developers and builders which had been put into place to cover the cost of county services and staff time allotted to oversee their projects. Because of these decreases, there has been a significant reduction of revenue coming into the county. So when the BOCC claims it has to reduce spending because of limited revenues, the citizens need to remember that it was this BOCC that eliminated these revenue sources so they should hardly be surprised when there is not enough money coming in to meet the projections of money going out. I sat in on the discussions of the Growth Task Force when they were discussing revenue sources and possibly raising the transfer tax. It became clear to me, listening to the discussions that even staff is having a difficult time keeping up with all the

changes being initiated under this BOCC; changes which are having a direct impact on revenue sources.

The current local tax structure has benefitted only a chosen few in this county. The Tax Increment Financing (TIF) agreements will divert needed tax revenue from the county's general revenue fund back to the developer. This is done to reimburse the developer for infrastructure improvements needed for development to move forward. But in years past, under previous BOCC's, the cost of these types of improvements were borne by the developer and considered the cost of doing business – the cost of being able to develop that land and make a profit from doing so. So while this money is being diverted back to the developer, there are people moving into these new houses and needing county services (schools, roads, snow removal, fire, rescue and police services, etc). But the tax money that would normally be used to pay for these services is going back to the developer. The taxpayers in the county are being required, through these agreements, to subsidize costs associated with the building and development of these communities. The county residents should not have their own taxes go up in order to subsidize these developments. This use of TIFs for residential development needs to be more carefully controlled and only used in the most critical cases. Neither of the two TIFs agreed to thus far meet that standard.

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?

First and foremost, we need to change how we treat the people involved in the education of our youth. We need to treat all of our FCPS employees with respect. For the past several years, the tone of the conversation between the BOE and the BOCC has been adversarial and combative. This must change. We are one county. We have one school system. We are all in this together and to have these two boards engaged in a battle is destructive and completely unhelpful when the budget discussions come around. We need to work cooperatively to find ways to fund both salary increases as well as COLA's for all FCPS staff – from the support staff right up through the administrative staff.

We also need to look at providing additional affordable housing in this county. The BOCC enacted a change in the requirements for developers allowing them to pay a fee rather than actually provide a certain number of Moderately Priced Dwelling Units (MPDUs) based on the size of the development, as required by law. This change to the zoning ordinance for new developments adopted by this BOCC, allows developers to pay a small fee in lieu of actually building these types of units. This change needs to be revoked. We need to be able to provide all types of housing for people wanting to live here, but particularly affordable

housing so that our support staff and beginning teachers can afford to live and work in Frederick County.

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?

You will note that 11 of these 13 schools are elementary schools. The growth in certain regions of the county continues to tax school capacity especially at the elementary level. Since the year 2000, FCPS has built more than 26 additional schools or additions and has renovated two older schools to bring them up to today's educational and building standards. It is the responsibility of the BOE to find ways to alleviate the overcrowding, and to prioritize future projects, both renovation as well as new capacity projects. It is the responsibility of the County to find ways to fund these projects, balancing the needs of the BOE with the needs of all the other capital projects from every other department in the county.

The Adequate Public Facilities Ordinance (APFO) is a crucial "tool in the toolbox" to help coordinate development with the availability of public facilities. At one time, the APFO was effectively used by the County Planning Department to ensure that development was timed to be built concurrent with the availability of certain public facilities (roads, schools etc.). The intent of the APFO was "to ensure that all adequate public facilities are reasonably available concurrent with new development so that orderly growth and development can occur".

However, this BOCC has gutted the APFO so that it is little more than a worthless tool in the planning toolbox. We need to revisit the APFO to strengthen the components of it which permitted growth in a more predictable manner, allowing for the planning and building of the necessary infrastructure needs that come with additional development (schools, roads etc.) in reasonable timeframe.

It will be incumbent upon the BOE to balance the needs of schools that are experiencing capacity challenges at the same time they make sure they are addressing the renovation needs of our older schools in a timely fashion. It will be up to the County Council to ensure that the BOE is prioritizing these projects in an equitable yet financially prudent manner. And it will be inherent upon the County Council to make sure the ordinances controlling growth and development

do not further contribute to the problem of overcrowding around the county. It will fall to all elected officials to have open and respectful meetings on a regular basis to communicate effectively what their specific needs and challenges may be.

It will take time to correct all the issues that have been (and will still be) created by the growth policies enacted and approved by this BOCC. However, I believe that the County Council, working collaboratively with the BOE, will be able to begin to make the changes necessary to address the many capital needs of the school system, both capacity as well as renovation needs.

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?

There needs to be a balance between the need for new seats and the need to renovate our older schools.

The County Council and the County Executive are tasked with deciding growth policies. This is an area where they can be effective in maintaining orderly, well planned and well thought-out growth across the county, which would in turn allow the school system to be able to effectively predict, plan and prioritize its capital projects. We need to revisit the APFO (Adequate Public Facilities Ordinance) and strengthen the components of it which allowed for a more predictable manner to plan for the necessary infrastructure needs that come with additional development (schools, roads etc.).

We need to agree on a realistic schedule for funding systemic maintenance projects such as repaving, re-painting etc. In addition, we also need to commit to establishing some sort of funding mechanism for technology. However, just establishing a “technology replacement cycle” is not enough. There needs to be a schedule for technology evaluation tied to a funding level so that there is regular ongoing evaluation of the changes in technology occurring, in conjunction with additional expenditures for new technology for the schools. This field is changing so quickly, we want to ensure that money spent for technology is spent wisely. This is again where on-going communication between the two boards is critical.

It all comes down to the BOE appropriately balancing the need for new schools against the need for older schools to be renovated. But the growth policies enacted and the development approvals given by the county have in integral impact on the ability of the BOE to plan effectively for its facilities’ needs. This in turn leads back to my assertion that there needs to be on-going, regular, respectful communication and planning between the BOE and the County.

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?

I am opposed to vouchers or other types of public funding for private or home schooling.

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?

I am highly skeptical that outsourcing or privatizing of jobs results in the long term savings so often touted by the proponents of this. I have found that while there may be an initial savings, in the long run, the private companies are in business to make a profit, and so the costs tend to go up during the length of the contract. I think under pressure by the current BOCC and some members of the BOE, there has been a concerted move to privatize everything possible. I worry that when it is determined that this has not resulted in long-term savings or when safety and security issues are raised, it will be too late to go back and recreate the positions lost in the outsourcing effort. I am still waiting to see all the figures showing that the outsourcing of the printing office functions for FCPS has actually resulted and will continue to result in long-term savings. This was all being pushed for “cost savings”. But I am still not convinced we will see those savings in the long term.

It is not the role of the County Council, any more than it was the role of the BOCC, to dictate to the BOE where, what or how they need to privatize – or even if they need to privatize. It is the role of the County Council to fund the BOE according to the needs of the school system as determined and laid out by the BOE. It is up to the members of BOE (duly elected by the citizens of this county), to decide how and where to spend the money that is allocated. I would certainly hope that the BOE members would be good stewards of the taxpayers’ money, looking for and exploring all opportunities for cost savings. I would encourage the BOE to properly analyze and evaluate potential savings before any final decisions are made, always keeping in mind their responsibility to the taxpayers’ of this county. But it is not the job of the County Council, any more than it was the job of the BOCC to micromanage the BOE and its budget.

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?

Absolutely, I support the right of the FCPS employees to bargain collectively. I also support the same right for all Frederick County employees, should they so choose.

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?

I have been a long-time advocate for education and the public school system. I have also been a long-time advocate for meaningful, on-going, two-way, respectful communication between the BOE, the BOCC and all the municipalities. Many of the misunderstandings and challenges faced at budget time, both the capital as well as the operating budgets, I believe can be traced back to miscommunications and lack of knowledge, on the part of all parties. Also, I believe sharing information helps build a base of understanding that then translates into a commitment to work together to solve problems rather than to continually fight about them.

While I was pleased to see the BOCC and the BOE schedule meetings on a regular basis over the past four years, unfortunately many of those meetings were canceled. I would hope for more regular, ongoing communications between the County Council and the BOE, and that both boards would actually commit to attend the meetings that are scheduled. Regular communication encourages collaboration and fosters mutual respect. If elected, as a council member, I would encourage the continuation of regularly scheduled joint meetings between the two boards, I would constrain my colleagues to attend these meetings and I would stress the importance of having the liaison to the BOE serve as a true conduit for information between the two.

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?

I think it is vital that the County Council treat the FCTA, FASSE and FCASA as the professional associations that they are, representing the qualified, well trained people working together for the betterment of our school system and our children. It is my belief that if the FCPS employees (support staff, administrative staff as well as teachers) felt that they were respected and valued, truly appreciated for their efforts and what they do each and every day it would go a long way toward improving relationships between the county government and these employee associations. I have sat in meetings and watched elected representatives express

animosity and disrespect for the leaders of these employee associations. I have wondered how the person expressing this disdain ever expects any level of cooperation to be reciprocated. Is it any wonder that there is so little regard for the school system employees if our elected leaders model such poor behaviors? I would certainly hope that my past history of working with all people in a cooperative, collaborative, respectful and reasonable manner would demonstrate how I would deal with FCTA, FASSE and FCASA if I were elected to the position of County Council representative.