

## **Mary Miller Answers for Housing, Trans., Fair Dev. Mayoral Forum**

### **Housing, Transportation and Fair Development Mayoral Forum**

**May 19 from 6:00pm to 8:00pm**

**Questions REVISED 5-14-20 (Note: Only question one has been revised to include homelessness)**

**Candidates must respond in writing on or before May 15 to all 10 questions.** Please submit responses to Matt Hill, [hillm@publicjustice.org](mailto:hillm@publicjustice.org). Responses will be posted on the web the day of the forum on May 19. Candidates will be asked for a verbal response to at least the first 6 questions at the forum. Candidate surrogates are not allowed to substitute for the candidate at the forum. Details about participation in the virtual forum on the webex platform will be provided shortly.

### **QUESTIONS**

- 1. The COVID-19 crisis threatens tens of thousands of Baltimore City households with eviction, foreclosure, and additional stress on our transportation network. Additionally, hundreds of people remain homeless and at serious risk of infecting themselves and others in congregate shelters and encampments. What specific measures would you take to help City residents avoid homelessness, eviction, foreclosure and additional deterioration of our transportation infrastructure?**

This is an unprecedented public health crisis that has exacerbated the dire realities that too many Baltimoreans were already facing. This is particularly true for our lowest income residents and those experiencing homelessness as they are at even greater risk of contracting the virus and also are suffering disproportionately from the economic hardships of the public health precautions.

How we respond to the economic crisis now will determine our city's future. The Federal Reserve has provided a Municipal Liquidity facility to help cities weather the storm with low interest, 3-year financing. The city's proposed budget does not appear to recognize what could be an important tool to avoid severe cutbacks. We should be accessing all of the available resources on the table. We should use a portion of those resources to immediately bolster the Affordable Housing Trust Fund and help both low-income or unemployed residents continue to pay for their housing. The federal CARES Act also appropriated funds to support city's transit systems. In the short term, we should use those funds to institute a fare holiday for the rest of the year while the city gets back on its feet. In the long term, I have called for the city to take stronger control of its

transportation destiny and would commission a study for the appropriate funding model for a regional transit authority. We also need more support from the State's highway user fees to maintain our aging roads and bridges.

2. **Fair Development centers our fundamental needs for housing, health care, work with dignity, education and a sustainable environment, in government housing and economic development policies, thereby advancing dignity for all Baltimore residents. Will your administration advance fair development in environmental policies? If so, will those policies include ending the city's contract with the BRESCO incinerator and fully implementing a Zero Waste plan that will address toxic pollution and waste in the City and how?**

Yes, I would advance the fundamentals of Fair Development in my environmental policies, as well as explore how they can be incorporated into other sectors. We need a just economy in Baltimore where all residents have equal access to living wage jobs, healthy neighborhoods, and health care.

The negative health impacts stemming from the BRESCO incinerator's air pollution are well documented, and I would end the city's contract permanently when it expires in 2021. That means we need city agencies to develop plans for reducing our waste now, and fair development and zero waste strategies must be an integral part of that plan.

Beyond closing the incinerator, I would work to improve public transit to reduce automobile usage, improve job prospects near where people live, increase the tree canopy, and ensure everyone lives only a short distance from a park or green space. All of these will move us closer toward a better environment and a more environmentally just city.

3. **The official count of vacant properties in Baltimore is 16,000. If elected Mayor, will you commit to using the funding and policy tools at your disposal to (a) convert at least 500 more properties a year from vacancy to occupancy, while prioritizing the needs of community residents living in neighborhoods with vacant structures, and (b) support estate planning for elderly residents to reduce the number of properties becoming vacant?**

I have an even more ambitious, transformative plan: my administration would launch a 4-year initiative, Baltimore Works, to sell 10,000 vacant homes to local developers, nonprofits, and

community land trusts, while using a local workforce to renovate those homes. Please see my answer in #5 for more details.

We absolutely need to find ways for residents to “age in place.” There are successful examples of this. We could use the Affordable Housing Trust Fund to help families rehabilitate their home to have a bedroom and bathroom for seniors on the first floor. We should also include estate planning as a service offered through free legal counsel as part of the Affordable Housing Trust Fund. I’d also look into using vacant city-owned buildings such as closed schools to create care homes for seniors in their own neighborhoods so as to displace them as little as possible. There are lots of creative ideas out there and I’m open to all of them.

4. **Baltimore City faces a wave of likely eviction actions due to COVID-19, and it is far from ready. Yet, evictions were already a crisis prior to COVID. Approximately 140,000 eviction cases are filed and almost 6,500 families are evicted each year with many becoming homeless. These evictions have a disparate impact on Black households and female-headed households and reinforce segregation. Baltimore Renters United is releasing a report stating that by investing \$5.7 million each year in a right to counsel in evictions, the City and State would realize \$35.6 million in benefits and costs avoided. How will you address evictions and will your plan include a right to counsel in eviction cases?**

From surprise medical billing to labor violations, there are too many instances where the power dynamic is imbalanced and individuals without lawyers are left to fend for themselves. This is especially true in housing and evictions, where only 1% of tenants have representation. We simply can’t afford to have such a system. Families and individuals who have unstable housing will suffer in health, educational, and employment outcomes. Instead of addressing the problem after the fact with social services and healthcare spending, we should be doing everything we can to prevent evictions from happening in the first place. That’s why I support a right to counsel for renters under a certain income or back-rent-owed threshold. I also applaud the Mayor’s recently announced COVID-19 rent assistance program, but note that it will expire in only a few months. As I address below, I would also use the Affordable Housing Trust Fund as a flexible tool to help both tenants and homeowners avoid eviction.

5. **In 2018, the City made a historic agreement with the Fair Development Roundtable and Community Development Network to fund the Affordable Housing Trust Fund at \$20 million/year. Yet, the revenue actually coming into the fund is far less than promised, and the proposed FY 2021 capital budget for DHCD is almost 40% lower than last year. Would your administration meet the City's obligation to fund the Affordable Housing Trust Fund with at least \$20 million/year without cutting other affordable housing funds and how? What other policies would you promote to support the development of affordable housing as well as ending homelessness?**

The Affordable Housing Trust Fund is an important, flexible tool that the city should be deploying to provide more rental and home ownership opportunities for low and very low income individuals and families. I would commit to fully funding the Affordable Housing Trust Fund if the existing funding from property transfer taxes is insufficient. We will make a commitment to sell 10,000 vacant homes over four years to small and local developers, community land trusts, and community development groups. We should prioritize the hiring of local workers who have been shut off from participating in Baltimore's economy to help renovate these homes, particularly returning citizens. The community land trusts who receive the vacant properties will focus on housing those experiencing homelessness, but the city should also identify how vacant, former schools or other city-owned properties could be converted to healthier housing for the homeless and those needing transitional housing.

6. **Light rail has emerged as the most robust generator of economic development across the nation over the last four decades. Seattle, Portland, Los Angeles, Denver, Charlotte, Dallas are excellent examples. How would you direct and encourage Baltimore City and regional housing and development planners to support the completion of the Red Line light rail project in order to achieve improved transit equity, reduced commute times, preservation of affordable housing, and the transformative community economic growth that follows transportation systems anchored by light rail?**

We need transit solutions now. One-third of residents don't have access to a car, and the transit system we have does not serve everyone efficiently or equitably. It is a major contributor to the perpetuation of poverty in our underserved communities.

Governor Hogan made the wrong decision when he cut the Red Line project and returned the federal funds. By the time that happened, the city and transit advocates had already put in a decade of research and work into the project. A regional transportation authority would give back control to the city and our surrounding partners to avoid this kind of disconnect between the people and the decision-makers. I would support a new feasibility study for Red Line because our city drastically needs faster priority East-West transit, but it would take at least another decade for the project to become a reality. In the meantime, Baltimore should be aggressively expanding its bus service, creating a Bus Rapid Transit system with priority signaling, bus-only lanes, and faster, reliable pick-up times.

7. **In the transportation industry, “Development Follows Rail” is a proven mantra. Accordingly, not one community economic development project is associated with the bus-focused Baltimore Link system. Banks don’t invest in bus stops. How would you re-direct or incentivize local and regional housing and development planners to pair transportation and land use in a long-needed, comprehensive development vision for Baltimore that includes emergency measures to provide permanently affordable housing?**

Baltimore has long lacked a comprehensive and equitable development vision. Much development in the city has been directed toward the same areas, leaving entire parts of Baltimore neglected. Transit-oriented development and finding policy solutions that ensure new development doesn’t displace long-time residents are key to making sure housing in Baltimore remains affordable as the city grows. Other cities have processes we can adapt for creating a unified transit and land use plans, such as Portland’s and Minneapolis complete neighborhood plans. My administration will return to a strong Deputy Mayor model, and two of those Deputy Mayors will have a vital role in ensuring Baltimore advances equitable, transit-oriented development. My Deputy Mayors for Economic Development and Equity and Inclusion will work with stakeholders to create an inclusive growth plan for the city of Baltimore, and set specific metrics for the city’s vision, such as the percentage of people living within a short walk to a bus or rail stop, the mileage of sidewalks and bike lanes installed. We must hold ourselves accountable to reaching our targets.

8. **Fair Development also demands that the City redress the harms of racism and predatory capitalism in the City's non-participatory budgeting process, the lack of access to capital among Black households and businesses, and the long history of exploitation in the workplace. Will you advance fair development in budgeting, banking, and the workplace? If so, will those policies include A) implementing a participatory and/or legislative budgeting process, B) prioritizing worker co-ops in City contracts, and C) conducting a feasibility study of a public bank in Baltimore City?**

From the start, my campaign has focused on the city's obligation to greenline historically disinvested neighborhoods in Baltimore to compensate for the decades of redlining and segregation. To break the cycle and move toward transformative change in Baltimore, everything should be on the table, including the three priority areas mentioned in this question. I am particularly interested in exploring ways to give communities access to credit to become small business owners or even purchase a home. We should definitely grow our non-profit credit facilities including community development financial institutions. Additionally, I support worker owned co-ops as a business model, as outlined in my inclusive growth plan, available at [electmarymiller.com](http://electmarymiller.com).

9. **Baltimore renters are often forced to live in substandard rental housing with mold infestation being one of the more dangerous and unaddressed issues. Some cities like Washington D.C., are exploring comprehensive mold regulations. Other jurisdictions have more rigorous rental licensing laws that do not allow the landlord to choose and hire the inspector charged with inspecting the property before the landlord can get a license. How would you address the serious threats to life, health and safety in Baltimore's rental housing?**

No person should have to live in substandard or unhealthy housing. The research is clear that the home environment has a significant impact on health outcomes. Unfortunately, years of disinvestment in neglected Baltimore neighborhoods has left many families trapped in unhealthy housing environments, leading to thousands of cases of lead poisoning, asthma-related hospital visits, and preventable home-related illnesses and injuries from mold and other dangers, disproportionately affecting African Americans.

Landlords who haven't completed the inspection process are more than a year past the January 1, 2019 deadline to do so. As Mayor, I would direct the Department of Housing and

Community Development to conduct extensive outreach to get the remaining landlords to register their homes for inspection. At the same time, we should make sure there are enough licensed inspectors who are able to assess the safety and quality of properties. The city needs to ensure protections are in place so that tenants in unsafe housing are not evicted without relocation assistance.

**10. Decades of racial segregation and disinvestment have produced neighborhood and housing conditions that have a negative impact on the physical and mental health of many Baltimore residents every day. The major health institutions in our city can play a more active role in addressing these issues, in partnership with City government and community-based organizations. Please describe how you as mayor will better align health institutions' support for making measurable improvements in City neighborhood and housing conditions?**

The City should collaborate with our health institutions on their community benefit programs to reach alignment on addressing the physical and mental health needs of Baltimoreans. As Mayor, I will direct our Housing and Public Health Departments to work together to address unhealthy housing issues to more effectively eliminate lead and mold exposure, reduce asthma triggers, promote energy efficiency, and protect our families from avoidable accidents. I will also provide comprehensive housing assessments in high-risk neighborhoods to ensure that no Baltimore family is living in a dangerous and unhealthy home.

I would also like to see our health institutions become more involved in addressing trauma, addiction, and other public health issues faced by so many in our city. Instead of criminalizing addiction, we should be focused on caring for those affected. Numerous evidence-driven interventions have been developed to reduce overdose deaths, some of which are already implemented by dedicated nonprofit organizations in our community. But implementing these interventions on a citywide level requires focus and commitment from City leadership and partners alike. As Mayor, I will enlist the partnership of our major health institutions and nonprofit agencies to assist with naloxone distribution and education, expand our existing needle exchange program, and invest in social and behavioral health supports so more people in crisis can have access to on-demand help from experienced professionals.

Finally, I will ensure special investment in trauma-informed practices for our youth and families. A variety of life factors – from racism to early traumatic events to unstable housing – have been shown to affect a child's educational, health, and future economic outcomes. As Mayor, I will invest in community schools that provide wraparound support, restorative justice

principles, and training for trauma-informed care for any service provider working with children and families.