



MONTGOMERY COUNTY COUNCIL
ROCKVILLE, MARYLAND

HANS RIEMER
COUNCIL PRESIDENT

Remarks by Councilmember Hans Riemer on Election as Council President

December 5, 2017

Friends, Montgomery County has always been a very special place to live.

We have long been known as one America's most appealing, if exclusive, suburban communities. Our leaders often sought to guard us from the changes happening around us.

But that is not what or who we are any more. We are changing for the better, and we must continue to change in order to stay relevant. Let us guard our values while embracing change, because we are not just suburban Montgomery, we are inclusive, metropolitan Montgomery.

People used to come here to get away from the city. Now I hear from residents that they want to be closer to restaurants and entertainment, they want streets that are safe for walking and biking, they want more access to public transportation.

We may have a reputation for liquor control, but today we have an emerging local brewery scene, whose entrepreneurs call Montgomery the best place in the region to open a business, and a growing winery industry.

We have imposing suburban office parks, but now we can confidently say - when Marriott or Amazon calls - we have the thriving downtowns, transit, workforce, inclusive values and progressive culture they are looking for.

We have built one of America's leading community colleges — and now, thanks to the Purple Line, Maryland's largest research institution in College Park will be just minutes away.

Today we are a global destination for immigrants from every walk of life, from doctors and NIH researchers to construction workers, landscapers and refugees. Less than a hundred years ago, we had neighborhoods where African Americans and Jews were not allowed.

Luckily, we still have all the things that made us a magnet for so long: great schools, leafy cul-de-sacs, a stable economy, a highly educated population, great recreational opportunities and a high quality of life.

But today these amenities are available to more than a million people - not just those who already have every advantage.

Being an inclusive metropolitan community brings new challenges. Our seniors feel the stress of change and more of our school children come from families that are struggling day to day.

But what makes me proud to call Montgomery County home is that we see the changing needs of our community as an opportunity to create opportunity.

Just in the past several years we have reduced MCPS class size and invested in Montgomery College, revolutionized workforce development and redeveloped economic development, and we are getting results.

Still there remains a giant gap in our educational system: 0-5 years old.

That gap is causing low income kids to fall behind before they even enter Kindergarten.

In fact, 70% of low-income children, defined as less than twice the federal poverty level, are entering kindergarten not ready to learn. They start school significantly behind their peers and we can't intervene enough in later years to close that gap.

It is time for us to embrace the goal of making sure that all children start kindergarten ready to learn.

Last year, under the banner of "incremental universalism," we added funds to make Head Start - pre-k for the lowest income four-year olds - a full day program.

As you know, following committee deliberations, Council staff is preparing a set of options for how the Council can make additional progress on early education. I look forward to working with you to identify those options that will earn the strongest support and getting as much help as we can from our partners in Annapolis.

Universal Pre-K is unaffordable unless we break it into bite size pieces - so let's get something done.

In closing, I will note that this is going to be a year, hopefully, of heightened public participation in our Council affairs. Emotions in our community are charged as our residents reject the destructive politics in DC and look to our leadership to provide a light in the storm. Our county elections, fueled by the revolutionary new public finance system we created, will engage voters as never before. We will have spirited, but civil, debate here at the Council, as we always do.

Now is a good time to focus on improving our communications with the community. My work begins by announcing a new tool that I requested from Council staff, a feature that allows our residents to subscribe to updates on content from the Council website. This feature will enable residents to be notified when particular legislation moves to public hearing, is scheduled or rescheduled for committee, and goes to a council vote.

The subscribe tool, which utilizes our new open data based Legislative Information Management System, is a great metaphor for how we should be thinking about communicating with the public. We can get better public input by doing a better job sharing the important information comprising our deliberations. I hope to work with my colleagues to pilot new ideas this year that future council presidents will improve upon.

Thank you, and again, I look forward to a productive year ahead.