

July 19, 2016

Comments on CB-40-2016 by

Prince George's County Council Member Dannielle M. Glaros

Over the past few weeks, I have had the chance to hear the thoughts and opinions of residents on the charter amendment to add two at-large seats to the County Council. I also had the chance to speak to colleagues in other jurisdictions with at-large members. Most other jurisdictions in the DC-MD-VA region have at-large representatives, so it has been interesting to consider if this is a model that would benefit our county.

I appreciate everyone who has taken the time to weigh in and share thoughts. As with all legislation I vote on, I carefully weighed the pros and cons, and took into consideration what residents see as the attributes and challenges. Today, the Prince George's County Council voted to put this charter amendment on the November 8, 2016 ballot. Only one Council Member voted no, not due to opposition with adding at-large Council Members, but because of a preference to wait until the 2022 redistricting in order keep the total Council size to nine.

Some see the creation of two at-large Council Members as an attempt to overturn term limits, so let me be clear in saying that, for me, this is not the focus. Yes, if the amendment receives a majority vote in November, Council Members who have served two consecutive four-year terms would be eligible to run for an at-large seat, as would any resident. However, that is not why I find consideration of at-large of greatest interest.

Today, I serve on a County Council with nine members who are responsible to the people who elect them. Should each Council Member consider the entire County in their decision making? Absolutely. But, too often, that is not the case. Parochialism is a constant challenge. At-large members could help ensure that at least two people have a broader perspective on every issue from education to pedestrian safety. These members would be looking at the connections between our communities rather than seeing issues solely as southern or central or northern concerns. At-large members will be responsible for serving all of the residents of the County--keeping us focused on the forest and not the individual trees. Consequently, these candidates should have the experience and capacity to represent a broad and varied array of interests, which reflect the diversity of this county.

Some have argued that at-large Council Members will dilute the voice of individual residents. That is a possibility. However, the opposite could also happen. Instead of one single-district representative, each resident would have three representatives—a district and two at-large representatives. Our voice could be magnified. If one Council Member is not responsive, then there are others to reach out to on constituent issues, for instance. Those living in Accokeek or Capital Heights or Laurel would have three people following what is happening in their community. More than just one member would be advocating on 210, the Purple Line or other critical infrastructure projects.

With all this said, it is ultimately up to each voter to elect leaders who have vision, courage, and compassion. We must take responsibility for electing leaders who will roll up their sleeves and problem-solve to ensure that Prince George's County reaches its potential instead of being swayed by a politician who tells us everything we want to hear or the politician who focuses on dividing us rather than uniting us. We should elect people with a track record of creating positive change.

I believe that the County is ripe for a conversation about at-large members. In the end, it is **you**, the voter, who will decide whether the County should add two at-large members in what will likely be an election with very heavy turnout. I encourage you to weigh the pros and cons and vote in the fall.