

Sierra Club, Montgomery County Group, Endorsement Explanation

#1 - Why did we endorse David Blair

The Sierra Club Montgomery County Group endorses David Blair because we believe he is the candidate who will be most successful in achieving our environmental goals. David Blair understands the urgency of addressing climate change and is running a campaign dedicated to action. He has a bold, achievable vision for Montgomery County where we grow public transit, support walkable and bikeable communities, emphasize smart growth and jobs in Montgomery County, and do our part to contribute to Maryland's transformation to relying on clean energy located in-state.

David will help grow renewable energy development by investing in the expansion of solar power generation. He will expand transit by bringing Ride-On into the 21st century and supporting real Bus Rapid Transit with dedicated lanes. He is committed to full implementation of the new Climate Action Plan and the Building Energy Performance Standards.

While we do not normally laud business experience, we believe that Mr. Blair's track record of executive leadership is what the County needs to put these ideas into action. We believe that with fresh leadership we will see further strides in implementation of important solutions to climate challenges.

To reach our endorsement decision we reviewed each candidate's policies, records, and skill sets. Each of the candidates who sought our endorsement brought unique skills, and experiences. Ultimately, we felt Mr. Blair not only brought a strong plan, but also the executive management skills that we think will be critical to execute on the policies the county needs.

#2 - Specific Policies and Attributes of David Blair

- **Rapid push on Climate Action Plan** -- Mr. Blair will turn the Climate Action Plan (CAP) into a real plan with actions, deadlines, measures, responsibilities, funding; he will identify a handful of high impact actions as priorities, and he will move aggressively to implement these; he will report every 90 days on progress on each priority action.
- **Smart Growth a priority** -- Mr. Blair will expand smart growth policies by focusing housing, retail, and jobs where we get maximum impact – at transit stations. Many people want to live affordably in pleasant mixed-use, mixed-income neighborhoods where they can walk, bike and take transit to meet their daily needs.
- **Expedited action on buses** -- Mr. Blair will move quickly to get real Bus Rapid Transit running in dedicated lanes -- when people have high quality transit, they'll use it; he'll push for permanent free fares for Ride-On buses; and revamp Ride-On bus routes to

better serve riders

- **Quick action on building energy systems** -- Mr. Blair will move aggressively to implement the recently enacted Building Energy Performance Standards (BEPS); to assure a smooth rollout, Blair will offer substantial support for building owners and managers (such as grants, loans, technical assistance).
- **Leadership style and management skills** -- A candidate's ideas are only as good as his ability to achieve them. We endorsed Mr. Blair because we think he will achieve them. Blair understands that he cannot achieve these goals on his own. He is focused on building a quality team, as he knows that this is essential to achieving success.
- **Attitude** -- Mr. Blair is a good listener and he is responsive. This may seem trite, but politics in Montgomery County has become stale, with candidates entrenched in their camps. Mr. Blair has traveled the county, meeting with different voters, understanding different issues. One thing everyone who meets him agrees is that he is a good listener. The same cannot be said for all candidates. This is key to building winning coalitions. We've already seen that Mr. Blair has actively listened to Sierra Club ideas and has been willing to take a second look at issues based on feedback.

#3 - Assessment of County Executive Marc Elrich

Many people have asked us, "why didn't you endorse Marc Elrich"? While we want to focus primarily on the positives of each candidate, since he is the incumbent and since many of you have asked, here are some of the key issues where we disagree with Mr. Elrich or where we believe he has *fallen short*.

- **Slow and Vague Climate Action Plan** -- On the positive side, during Mr. Elrich's term, the county developed the "Climate Action Plan" (CAP). But, on the negative side, this document is not really a plan, as it does not clearly lay out a plan of action with specific responsibilities, deadlines, and budget specifications. In addition, the CAP completely omits land use, one of the most important ways that a local government can impact climate change. Mr. Elrich has tried to justify this omission by suggesting that land use is addressed in Thrive 2050, but he has simultaneously opposed Thrive.
- **Unfriendly to Smart Growth (housing, density, land use)** -- Mr. Elrich is opposed to Thrive 2050, which would set the foundation for a Smart Growth future for the county. Mr. Elrich claims to be pro-affordable housing, but his actions indicate otherwise. Mr. Elrich has opposed several key proposals for adding housing in MoCo -- including the important Affordable Housing at Metro Act. Mr. Elrich rejected (Nov 2019) the housing targets set by MWCOC and the Urban Institute; this was in contrast to the actions of other regional leaders (e.g., DC Mayor Bowser, Fairfax Bd of Supervisors Chair Bulova). Recently he opposed adding housing to the redevelopment of the Chevy Chase Library -- caving to neighborhood opposition, even though the library is walking distance to a

new Purple Line station, a perfect Smart Growth location.

- ***Failure to Execute on Bus Rapid Transit*** -- Mr. Elrich's 2018 platform emphasized moving forward with Bus Rapid Transit (BRT). Yet over the past 3 years that movement has been sluggish at best. The so-called FLASH "BRT" on Route 29 runs in mixed traffic for much of the route. To be successful in attracting riders, a BRT must run in dedicated lanes; but Mr. Elrich has been slow in bringing together MCDOT and MDOT to assure that the Route 29 BRT runs in dedicated lanes. For other BRT lines (such as 355 and Veirs Mill), very little progress has been made in the past 3 years.
- ***Opposition to Farm Solar, No Progress on Rooftop*** -- Mr. Elrich stood firmly with the Council members who opposed the proposal to permit solar installations on the county's Ag Reserve. While he has stated that he prefers rooftop solar or larger solar projects on developed land, his administration has done very little to advance either of these.

#4 - Assessment of Mr. Riemer

Councilmember Riemer has a stronger record than Mr. Elrich on clean energy and smart growth. However, in 2021, Mr. Riemer blindsided the Sierra Club and undermined our campaign when he led the effort to breathe life back into the stalled Governor's highway plan at the region's Transportation Planning Board.

Mr. Riemer was successful in passing legislation to expand Accessory Dwelling Units, but has not been as successful in translating many of his other positions into legislative victories. For example, his legislation to allow solar on the agricultural reserve was so diluted through amendments that it will have little to no impact. While we agree with Mr. Riemer's position on solar, his inability to bring the council together to pass the strong solar legislation raises concerns about his ability to execute on his goals. We feel similarly about the delayed legislative progress on Thrive 2050.

We believe Mr. Blair has the strongest executive skills to translate his policies into results.

#5 - The Sierra Club Endorsement Process

We have a two-step process involving two groups of democratically elected Sierra Club leaders. The process starts with our grassroots members generating environmental priorities and evaluating candidates who will act on those priorities. All together the decision usually involves 30 or more democratically elected Sierra Club volunteer leaders. To ensure the integrity of our process Sierra Club members who are candidates for office or members of political party central committees do not participate in endorsement decisions.

Sierra Club believes in holding elected officials accountable to high standards of policy, transparency and consultation, and we are committed to holding them accountable to the campaign promises they make.

If you have further questions, please contact Dave Sears, political chair for the Sierra Club, Montgomery County Group at <davidwsears@aol.com>

By authority Charles Skinner, Treasurer, Sierra Club MD Chapter PAC.