

VOICES
OF LAUREL

CITY COUNCIL

VOTERS' GUIDE

A Nonpartisan Look at the Candidates for the November 2nd Election



A NOTE FROM THE LAUREL HISTORY BOYS

When the *Laurel Leader* ceased local coverage this past July, we realized that it would no longer produce a Voters' Guide as it had for so many previous municipal elections. Believing this to be an important tool, we set out to include it as a key part of our *Voices of Laurel* Fall issue. With the help of the City of Laurel, we presented a set of questions to each candidate who qualified, with the understanding that we would print their responses verbatim—unedited, and exactly as received. The Laurel History Boys will not endorse any candidate or offer any suggestions or comments to voters. We are providing this Voters' Guide as a public service.

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AT-LARGE

Two candidates are vying for the **one at-large seat** on the City Council, representing both Wards 1 and 2.



Martin Mitchell

Prior office(s) held in Laurel:
None

Age: 31

Education: Bowie State University (B.S., History and Government); Laurel High School.

Length of Laurel residency: 25 years

Name two things the City currently does well:

I believe the City of Laurel has historically provided exceptional emergency services. Communities that aren't safe, with residents who don't feel secure, are destined to struggle. As a father of two young sons, I am deeply grateful to the brave men and women who risk and sacrifice so much to protect the rest of us. I also believe our Department of Public Works provides dependable trash collection, recycling and snow and ice removal services. Even throughout the COVID pandemic, these hard-working public servants have worked tirelessly to meet a high standard of service reliability.

If elected, would you support continuing these two things: Yes

Name two things the city currently does NOT do well:

As I've said throughout my campaign, I believe the City can and must do more to beautify our Main Street – both to make our current businesses more appealing to residents and visitors, and to attract new independent, locally-owned businesses that would broaden our tax base and add to our quality of life.

I also believe we must recognize that, as Laurel becomes younger and more demographically diverse, we must become better at providing recreational and educational opportunities for our children. Such programs break down racial and economic barriers, enhance community safety and improve public health outcomes.

If elected, how would you fix these two things:

As Councilman, I will work to make Laurel's Main Street more beautiful and more functional through the following enhancements:

- Replacing aged, discolored, and splintered street posts with more attractive and eco-friendly materials;
- Installing of street banners and flower planters to give Main Street a distinctive sense of place;
- Stronger code enforcement for commercial properties;

- Extending weekend and evening bus service on Main Street, as well as lobbying the Maryland Department of Transportation for weekend and evening MARC train service to Laurel;
- Determining both the appropriate local and the funding mechanism for a new municipal parking lot on, or near Main Street. To provide youth sports and recreational opportunities for Laurel's children, and residents of all ages, I will advocate for a full-service YMCA facility in the City of Laurel. That process will begin with a feasibility study in partnership with the YMCA of Central Maryland.

What should be the City's #1 priority for the next decade?

As Laurel continues to grow, we must rely upon an innovative visioning and a planning process that prioritizes the revitalization of Main Street, protects our open spaces and rivers from suburban sprawl, prevents traffic congestion and attracts the good-paying jobs and revenue that support essential amenities. I want Laurel to become the model of a small city that balances a thriving 21st-century economy with a vibrant, sustainable quality of life for all.



Frederick Smalls

Prior office(s) held in Laurel: City Council (2002–2019); Laurel Planning Commission (2002–2019);

Chairman, Board of Appeals (current); Parks & Recreation CAC; Chairman, Laurel Regional Hospital Board of Directors, Chairman, University of MD Medical System Laurel Citizen Advisory Commission; PTA President-Scotchtown Hills Elementary School; President-Belle Ami Condominium Homeowner Assoc.

Age: 71

Education: Washington Technical Institute (now UDC) AA degree; Catholic University (Paralegal Studies)

Length of Laurel residency: 34 years

Name two things the City currently does well:

Managing city finances & ensuring public safety. The nationwide health and financial crisis has placed importance in service delivery. It's a time when government needs to deliver on its mission for economic stability and safety for families and communities.

If elected, would you support continuing these two things:

 Yes

Name two things the city currently does NOT do well:

Maintaining trust and transparency should be at the core for the public sector. The City must continuously improve its delivery of equitable, inclusive services that require the integration of small businesses, affordable housing, technology and a culture of partnership with business. And industry.

If elected, how would you fix these two things:

Work with the mayor and council and stakeholders to develop plans that take advantage of established smart solutions to address traffic, connectivity, and safety issues. Use technology and partnerships to better connect citizens to access to local jobs. Identify best practices related to equitable housing and establish housing policies that help all residents enjoy home ownership.

What should be the City's #1 priority for the next decade?

Continuously enhance innovative ways to deliver city services, programs and public safety to our diverse community.

CITY COUNCIL VOTERS' GUIDE

WARD 1

Only two candidates are **running unopposed** for the two seats in Ward 1.



Carl W. DeWalt

Prior office(s) held in Laurel:
Council Member—Ward 1,
Past 4 years

Age: 66

Education:

University of Cincinnati
Associate in Science - Law Enforcement
Bachelor of Science - Criminal Justice
Northwestern University
Police Staff and Command
Maryland Municipal League
Graduate of “Academy Of Excellence”
in Local Governance Program

Length of Laurel residency: 36 years

Name two things the City currently does well:

#1 EVENTS:

Laurel Board of Trade
Main street festival and parade, Halloween on
Main Street and Fall Riverfest
LARS—Laurel Advocacy Referral Services
Turkey Trot
Thanksgiving & Christmas Food and
Toys Distribution
Emancipation Day Celebration,
Emancipation Day 5K Run

City of Laurel
4th of July Parade, Celebration and Fireworks
Christmas Parade
Laurel Police provides safety and traffic control
during all of these events.
Historical Society McCeney March

#2 ACTIVITIES: Swimming Pools, state of the art
playgrounds, Excerise Centers, Walking & Jogging
Paths, a new safe pedestrian walking path that
connects to Howard County across the Northbound
Rt. 1 bridge.

**If elected, would you support continuing these
two things:** Yes

**Name two things the city currently does NOT
do well:**

#1 Development
Patuxent Greens—High Density built in a floodplain
with the current approved plan of (167 detached
homes and 222 townhouses) The developer just
went back to the planning commission and proposed
up to 450 units (now 97 detached homes and 353
townhouses) it was denied due to the substantial
change. This method by the developers seems to
have created a pattern and why the city caters to
developers is questionable.

#2 The revitalization of Main Street—
Ive heard for many years revitalization of Main
Street would happen... The City has made progress
but there’s still along way to go!

If elected, how would you fix these two things:

- Clean-up and remove the litter
- Weed the tree beds and cover them with live mulch
- Enhance the safety of crosswalks at 4th and Main
and 6th and Main
- Bring our Hometown Hero Banners that are
invisible on Cherry Lane and give the recipients the
respect and visibility they deserve on Main Street.
- More quality businessees
- Prevent additional development such as B Street
Development—The storm water run-off from all
the developments along Main Street recently
caused a section of the walking path to be
destroyed. The City just paid almost 50k to get
it repaired.

**What should be the City’s #1 priority for the
next decade?**

Transparency throughout our government,
with business owners and the most important
transparency is with the City of Laurel Citizens.

Thank god we have Laurel 4 the Patuxent and Veterans
of the American Legion Post # 60 for their hard work
with the restoration along the Patuxent River.



James Kole

Prior office(s) held in Laurel:
City of Laurel Ethics Commission—
Alternate

Age: 32

Education: Bachelor of Science—Penn State
University

Length of Laurel residency: 6 years

Name two things the City currently does well:

The City currently delivers our citizens great Public
Safety Services and ensures that our City continues
to expand services available to residents, without
increasing taxes.

**If elected, would you support continuing these
two things:** Yes

**Name two things the city currently does NOT
do well:**

There is currently room for improvement in our
City’s Building Codes regarding requirements for
Green Infrastructure in new development. I also see
room for improvement in our City’s traffic control
practices, particularly in speed control.

If elected, how would you fix these two things:

If elected, I will work with the Mayor, council
members, and City staff to review other municipality
ordinances regarding Green Infrastructure. These
can then be modified, customized to the needs of
Laurel, and added to our current City Ordinances.
Our current traffic patterns allow some motorists
to cut through neighborhoods. Sometimes these
vehicles are “racing” and occasionally have modified
exhaust systems. The City has already started a
traffic study for certain areas of the City to address
this issue. I would work with the Mayor and other
members of the Council to ensure the study is
adequately funded, and if necessary help allocate
additional funding for other locations. From the

study results, we can then work to strategically
implement the recommendations. By implementing
new traffic calming devices we can reduce the
number of vehicles that cut through our community.

**What should be the City’s #1 priority for the next
decade?**

The City should plan for responsible, sustainable
growth and development. By this I mean adding and/
or revitalizing areas of the City to attract additional
residents through enhanced entertainment venues,
great housing, and environmentally friendly
practices for our future generations. Laurel is a great
place to live, grow, and thrive. We need to make sure
that our future growth and development ensure that
we remain an attractive, affordable location when
compared to other other surrounding cities.

WARD 2

Three candidates are competing for the **two seats** in Ward 2.



Brencis D. Smith

Prior office(s) held in Laurel: Councilmember-Ward 2

Age: 32

Education: Bachelor of Science – Organizational Management, Washington Adventist University

Length of Laurel residency: 7 years

Name two things the City currently does well:

Our city does well with protecting our environment through our Recycling and Composting Programs. We do well with taking care of our community. One prime example that I am extremely proud of is our COVID-19 Emergency Relief Program. It provided energy, rental and mortgage assistance. We helped our small businesses grow by funding our Small Business Grant Program. We also formed partnerships with local organizations for food distribution during this pandemic.

If elected, would you support continuing these two things: Yes

Name two things the city currently does NOT do well:

There are two areas that we have the potential to grow in (1) Diversifying outreach programing, programing that reaches all demographic back grounds through entertainment, and (2) Voter outreach and turnout, I say that because turn out has been historically low. The city can do more to reach all ages of voters resulting in higher voter participation.

If elected, how would you fix these two things:

Since being elected I have found ways to bring the resources of the government to the people. I have sought to make city government accessible by hosting various events. In my next term I plan to continue forming collaborative partnerships by hosting events that speak to all demographics of the city. I also would continue to work closely with the administration to show them how to plan such events so they will become annual and continue long after I am gone. Through these events, the citizens can enjoy themselves as well as get to know each other, their elected officials, police and services the city, county and state offers.

What should be the City's #1 priority for the next decade?

We should focus on the quality of life for our residents, especially our seniors. That is a broad statement, but it speaks for environmental issues, entertainment, public safety, thriving Main Street, advocating for better schools in our county, and job growth to name a few.



Keith R. Sydnor

Prior office(s) held in Laurel: City Councilmember Ward 2

Age: 53

Education: Bachelor Individualized Studies (BIS) Virginia State University

Length of Laurel residency: 15 years

Name two things the City currently does well:

- Investing in the Main Street Businesses with various grants
- Youth Services Commission Grant for nonprofit organization to engage our children in positive programs

If elected, would you support continuing these two things: Yes

Name two things the city currently does NOT do well:

- Addressing the speeding of automobiles in residential neighborhoods
- Attendance of citizens at the Mayor & City Council Meetings

If elected, how would you fix these two things:

- Installing traffic calming devices
- Increase the advertisement of the meetings via social media platforms

What should be the City's #1 priority for the next decade?

Working with our congress representative, state legislators and our county District 1 councilmember to address affordable housing



Jeffrey Mills

Candidate chose not to respond

General Election Information

The City of Laurel General Election will be held on Tuesday, November 2, 2021. The election is for five (5) City Council seats: two (2) from Ward 1, two (2) from Ward 2, and one (1) At-Large.

The City Council serves a two (2) year term. The Board of Election Supervisors will hold a traditional election with a heavy focus on absentee ballots. Early Voting and Election Day voting will be done in accordance with CDC guidelines regarding Covid-19.

This Voters' Guide was produced by The Laurel History Boys exclusively for Voices of Laurel.



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