

2010 SPPACE Questionnaire

DAN MURREY, MD, MPP Candidates for the Mecklenburg Board of County Commissioners At Large

1. What are the top three issues facing Mecklenburg County and how do you propose to address them?

First is the economy. Unemployment rates have doubled in the past two years and much of our budgetary woes follow from the loss of jobs and general uncertainty about the economy. For the County budget this has resulted in a severe drop in sales tax revenues which has created shortfalls in 2009 and 2010. We need to do everything we can to incentivize new businesses to come to Charlotte. As a member of the Economic Development Committee I have supported every reasonable application for tax incentives that would influence a company to choose Mecklenburg County over an alternative site. I have also supported developing greater supports for small business development.

Second is the performance of our school system. Far too many children fail to graduate from CMS schools or are ill-prepared for the workforce when they do. If we are to be able to be competitive long-term, we need to fix this. I have pushed for a greater focus on keeping kids in school, particularly those at highest risk for failure. Those who fail to graduate have a much higher likelihood of being unemployed, being jailed, and/or requiring public assistance. If we want every child in Mecklenburg to have the chance to live with independence and dignity and contribute to our society, the first step is to get an education.

Third would be balancing our budgetary priorities to maintain core services to the degree feasible while holding steady on the tax rate. If revenues are down (which they are), you have 3 choices: raise taxes, get more efficient, or cut services. Given the current economic climate, I believe it would be counterproductive to raise taxes right now. Last year, in an effort to enhance efficiency, the county budget was cut about 9%. While I am constantly looking for new ways to do business in the county, much of the efficiency was squeezed out last year and those that weren't will require long-term changes before they will see results. That means that services will be cut this year. We need to make sure that the most essential services (education, child protection services, senior services, public safety, emergency services and the like) are preserved. Other important services like parks and libraries must also remain accessible but they may just become a little less convenient for the time being. Capital spending that jeopardizes our bond rating and increases our long-term operational costs must be critically evaluated. Pay-go funding and public-private partnerships that leverage public funds will need to play a bigger role.

2. In 2007, the North Carolina General Assembly authorized counties, subject to voter approval, the ability to impose an additional general fund revenue source (a .4% land transfer tax or a .25% sales tax). Do you support a .4% land transfer tax? Do you support a .25% sales tax? Please explain your answer.

As stated above, given the current economic climate, I don't support a tax increase at this time.

- 3. It has recently been reported in the local media that Mecklenburg County faces an estimated budget shortfall of \$16 to \$60 million dollars in FY 2010-2011. How do you plan to address this issue?**

See above.

- 4. Do you support Public-Private Partnerships for the construction of schools? Please explain your answer.**

Yes, we need to leverage any capital dollars we spend to the greatest extent possible, as long as the end result is a school that meets State requirements and the County's needs.

- 5. If the General Assembly authorized Mecklenburg County to hold a "Pennies for Progress" referendum similar to South Carolina's, would you support putting the measure before voters? If yes, for what infrastructure projects (i.e. roads, schools, parks, libraries, courts, jails, etc.) would you advocate using the money?**

I like this idea for transportation funding, especially given that Mecklenburg's needs for funding of both roads and transit outstrips current funding support from the State and Federal governments. If put to a referendum I believe there are many projects that the public would support including the completion and widening of I-485 and the development of new transit lines to University, North Meck and possibly even Matthews. The only downside is that it would probably reduce the likelihood that the State would revisit the equity funding formula for transportation dollars. Hopefully the attempts by our legislative body in Raleigh session to reopen that formula will be successful.

- 6. Are you in favor of the Mecklenburg County playing a role in incentivizing environmentally sustainable development? Please explain your answer.**

Yes. This is critical to our long-term viability and livability and it aligns well with our growing reputation as an energy business development hub. A large part of the growth in the energy sector will be in sustainable energy and sustainable development goes hand-in-hand with it.