

Candidate Name: Mark Pierzchala

Office Seeking: Mayor

Q1. Bicycling and bike infrastructure enhances quality of life and addresses issues such as affordability, equity, access, health, and the safety of our streets. What can the City of Rockville and you as an elected official do to actively encourage more people to ride their bikes?

A1: We must get cars under control, and I have publicly advocated for more red-light and speed cameras. This was enabled in the City's latest budget. I worked with former City pedestrian and bike coordinator Kevin Belanger to make sure all bike/pedestrian paths through City parks are marked on the City's bike map. These provide safe and enjoyable paths between neighborhoods. I have also long advocated for much more bike-route signage. The City is so hilly and its roads so curvy, it is hard for people to know how to get from one place to another on a bike. I have worked with RBAC to help effectively advocate for budget and master plan items.

I am Rockville's most visible cyclist, as I ride my bike year-round across the city with an American flag and my name displayed. As I bike and come across issues, I notify City Staff of items to correct. I have done this many times over the years. Around 2014, I led a City initiative to alert commercial property owners of the need and opportunity to install bike parking near retail and services.

One of the biggest challenges for new or resuming adult cyclists is that Rockville is so hilly. Electric bikes may help resolve this problem. I also favor RBAC's plan for additional Bike Share stations in Twinbrook.

Q2. People bike and walk when it's safe, comfortable, and connects to the places they need to go. Rockville's bike infrastructure is still disjointed. In your opinion, where are the most urgent gaps in our bike network and what steps do we need to take to close these gaps?

A2: State Highway 355 (SH355), especially reaching the many shops on either side, can be daunting. I do it by riding on the sidewalks. This would be solved on the South Pike if Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) comes in. I'm all in favor of squeezing existing SH355 car lanes to make room for bike lanes, but this is a State Highway, and that is a hurdle to overcome. The tracks are a barrier and I favor bridges over the tracks. The proposed one near Twinbrook Metro may come to fruition in the future; a site that I proposed several months ago now looks to be the favorite. Finally, I have broached the idea that municipalities should be responsible for maintaining and improving state highways within their boundaries and be reimbursed by the State. This would enable the City to be much more responsive. It will take legislative approval for this to happen and I'm committed to working with our partners in the state legislature to make this happen. For example, sidewalks along SH355 are problematic for folks that use wheelchairs or scooters. This is especially true for crossing driveway aprons. Currently it can take years to fix these issues and damaged sidewalks and Rockville would be able to do this much more quickly.

Another gap that I've come across is that biking through Town Center, south to north, is surprisingly difficult. You cannot legally make a left turn going north on Monroe Street to west on East Middle Lane. The intersection of Maryland and Beall Avenue is also difficult to navigate turning west on Beall. It is essentially a 4-way intersection where one of the roadways is a parking lot – it's just very confusing for a cyclist.

Crossing I-270 on Montrose Road or Falls Road is always an adventure. Especially in the summer, vegetation obscures the on and off ramps, and cars are not at all slowing down, much less expecting to have to deal with pedestrians or cyclists.

Biking or walking across the railroad tracks on Edmonston Drive or Twinbrook Parkway, on the sidewalks, is very uncomfortable due to the speeding cars and the narrow width of the walks. In the summer, vegetation can narrow the walking path on Twinbrook Parkway.

In south Rockville, in the area around Congressional Plaza, it has always been difficult to cycle due to congestion on East Jefferson, Halpine Road, and Congressional Lane. Biking on Montrose going west must be done on a sidewalk.

I'm committed to working with RBAC, WABA, and the Rockville Pedestrian Advocacy Committee (RPAC) to find practical and common sense solutions to these and other gaps.

Q3. Cities across the country are installing protected bike lanes, bike lanes with physical separation between bike and automobile traffic, to encourage more people to ride and increase comfort for cyclists of all ages and abilities. Studies have shown that protected bike lanes increase roadway safety for everyone – people bicycling, walking, and driving. Do you support the installation of protected bike lanes on Rockville's streets? Do you support installing protected bicycle facilities if it requires replacing a motor vehicle travel lane and delays motorized vehicles by a few seconds? Please explain why.

A3: I supported the protected lanes on Old Georgetown Road and participated in the WABA bike ride. I continue to support this project when it comes up to me in conversations. As I campaign, one of the most common questions I hear about is the upcoming bike lanes on North Washington. I defend that spending, however, there are very limited opportunities for truly protected bike lanes, and for closing lanes. You always have to be aware of shunting traffic elsewhere making things worse for others. The big unspoken issue is that there must be **behavioral changes** for all parties. We cannot build our way out of all problems.

Q4. Voters care about street safety, bicycling, transit, and walking issues. Why should these voters vote for you?

A4: No other candidate has my decades-long advocacy, voting record, and effectiveness in making Rockville more biker and pedestrian friendly. No one knows the City as well as I do as both a biker and a pedestrian. I have biked every street in the City 6 or 7 times (latest effort completed April 11, 2023) and I have walked every street once (2014 and 2015). I also won't forget the rollers; these are wheelchair and scooter users among others and I'm committed to vastly improving sidewalks for them.

Q5. The City of Rockville adopted a Vision Zero Plan in 2020, with the principle that transportation should focus on safety of all road users (cyclists, pedestrians, transit users, and motorists) as a foundation, and that the only acceptable number of deaths and serious injuries on the road is zero. How do you propose to advance Vision Zero in the city of Rockville?

A5: The strategy known as Vision Zero has many precedents. There is a Complete Streets policy that was implemented many years ago. The City has been working on these improvements for many years and it should be recognized that this is nothing new. Vision Zero as a strategy was first brought to the City Council by my Team Rockville colleagues Tom Moore and Julie Palakovich Carr, then carried on by myself and other elected members. While this questionnaire emphasizes infrastructure improvements, behavioral improvements are also needed. Some collisions occur where there are no infrastructure issues.

As a person who is constantly 'on the ground', either on bike or on foot, I see distracted drivers, speeding drivers, distracted pedestrians (e.g., staring at their cell while crossing SH355), and it must be mentioned, cyclists blowing through stop signs and red lights. I have advocated for more traffic cameras both as a deterrent and as a revenue source. All monies collected from these cameras can be used for infrastructure improvements. Money from these sources remove the competition aspect as any General Fund Capital Improvement Project (CIP) is competitive across all City functions. Not to mention that the City has an over \$60 Million hole in its CIP projects. Note also that the City gets transportation improvement revenue from some development projects and these monies can be used for selected improvements.

Q6. What neighborhood do you live in? Why? Where are your favorite places to spend time in our town?

A6: I live in College Gardens. When my wife and I moved to Rockville in 1996, I drew a circle on a map to live within walking/biking distance of Westat on Research Boulevard. Our present house is the only house we could afford within that circle. In my several years working at Westat, I walked or cycled there about 99% of the time.

My favorite 'place' is anywhere outdoors in Rockville, whether biking or walking its streets and paths, or visiting any of its over 60 parks, and I have visited all parks. My mother now lives in Rockville Town Center, and that has become my favorite indoor place.

Q7. Approximately 5% of the FY 23 Capital Improvement Program transportation program area budget is allocated for pedestrian and bicycle projects. Do you think that the capital budget allocation for bike infrastructure is too much, just right, or too little? Please explain your answer.

A7: The 5% is what we can afford. Rockville has a huge CIP funding problem, resulting in a large prioritization problem. For this reason, I have sought to expand funding for biking and pedestrian projects through increased red-light and speed camera revenue. I have also long

supported transit oriented, mixed-use projects both that get the developers to integrate people's modes of transit in their projects and as a source of funds.

Q8. Please explain your opinion of the proposed Bus Rapid Transit projects along MD 355 and MD 586, and how bicycling and walking fit into this picture.

A8: Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) projects will underperform when buses do not have dedicated lanes. Establishing dedicated lanes is difficult due to space constraints. We are not working with a blank slate, and I'm not tearing up homes to provide more lanes. If we replace car lanes with bike/pedestrian lanes, we run the risk of flooding neighborhood streets with overflow traffic, creating safety problems there. I'm all in favor of expanded virtual working arrangements to cut down on the number of needed commuting trips, which is a possibility for many office workers.

I am looking forward to the BRT along MD 586. It's the route most suited for a first BRT in Rockville due to existing bus usage. I await the massive infrastructure funding for the BRT on MD 355 that will have to come from the State and the County. Rockville can help to plan and prepare, but Rockville cannot fund.

Q9. Do you have a biking related story you'd like to tell?

A9: Every couple of years, I bike every street in Rockville, about 400 miles total. This is both for exercise and to maintain my knowledge of the City's streets, paths, and places. This year I completed my latest bike trip just before my 71st birthday. There are now several people who have also accomplished this trek. But, as far as I know, my 2014/2015 walk of every street in Rockville, and surrounding area, has never been replicated. That was over 500 miles of walking and I took over 34,000 photos along the way.

The photos were of places, issues, situations, houses, buildings, and whatever nature I came across. Only a handful of the pictures had any people in them. I became very good at waiting for people to walk behind a tree and snapping the photo before they re-appeared. I have pictures of every park in Rockville and every public school campus. I took amazing pictures of out-of-the-way places, in or near City limits, that few people have seen. The attached picture is of the underneath of Norbeck Road, just Northeast of Redgate Golf Course.

