

## WABA Questionnaire - 2023

Candidate Name: **Yamil Hernández**  
Office Seeking: **Gaithersburg City Council - Council Member**  
Web site: **VoteYamil.com**

Q1. Bicycling and bike infrastructure enhance quality of life and address issues such as affordability, equity, access, health, and the safety of our streets. What can the City of Gaithersburg and you as an elected official do to actively encourage more people to bicycle for transportation and recreation?

**A1. There are two main issues when it comes to promoting biking. First, some of our streets don't feel safe to bike in, so those who are inclined to ride may choose not to due to a lack of safe infrastructure. Although City Ordinance (a unique feature of Gaithersburg) allows cycling on sidewalks, many aren't aware of this, or may not see it as a viable option. Second, there may be people who are unaware or do not fully understand the benefits of this as a transportation option. We should look for more opportunities to educate and promote biking as well as seriously address the design challenges and lack of adequate infrastructure. In short, awareness, education, and enhancing infrastructure.**

Q2. People bike and walk when doing so is safe, comfortable, and connects to the places they need to go. Gaithersburg's bike infrastructure is incomplete and 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? Gaithersburg published a [Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan](#) in August 1999. Will you promote creation of a new, up-to-date Gaithersburg Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan?

**A2. The biggest gap is I-270. There are not a lot of safe, obvious, easy, and convenient ways to cross 270 (which bisects our city). Muddy Branch Road and the Interchanges are suboptimal for cycling and pedestrian movement. I have heard from cycling and transportation advocates that designated biking/pedestrian connectivity between Malcom King and Morris Parks would help enhance this gap. The City is currently undergoing a comprehensive zoning project (<https://www.retoolgaithersburg.com>). Once that is completed, it makes sense to look at updating the Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan. Over the last 23+ years, there have been a lot of changes to the city therefore reviewing, revisiting, and updating these plans makes sense.**

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Q3. Cities across the country are installing protected bike lanes, with physical separation between bicycle and motor-vehicle 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 Gaithersburg's streets? Do you support installing protected bicycle facilities even if they require replacing a motor vehicle travel lane and delay motorized vehicles by a few seconds? Please explain your thinking.

**A3. The data is clear on the benefits of protected bike lanes (PBL) to cyclists. Alas, the cost, complexity, potential traffic impacts, and vocal opposition to these projects is also an issue. Additionally, as an example, down county has different needs and geography realities than Gaithersburg (e.g., Metro Access, bus routes, walkability, density, etc.). There is good news to share, however. Recently MDSHA shared their post-installation analysis for the PBLs in Old Georgetown Road.**

**H/T to Del. Korman for sharing (<https://twitter.com/mkorman/status/1697724751957901473>). One of the take-aways that I found encouraging was that although initially the installation of PBL slowed traffic, speeds returned to normal shortly thereafter. For those that oppose PBL on the basis of traffic impacts, this is a new data point to show that PBL and car traffic can coexist in some harmony. For Gaithersburg, there are additional options to PBL that could be of benefit like side paths. I keep an open mind on this and other issues, and look for data driven options.**

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

**A4. I understand the concerns many residents have about street safety and active transportation. My aim is to make Gaithersburg a safer and more accessible city for cyclists, pedestrians, and transit users alike. I am committed to Complete Streets policies that prioritize not just cars but all modes of travel, while taking into account the realities of our geography. Big redevelopment projects like Lakeforest, will offer an opportunity to further show my advocacy in these matters. My public policy interests are aligned with these objectives. A vote for me is a vote for a comprehensive and community-focused approach to making our city better for everyone.**

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Q5. The City of Gaithersburg, unlike the State of Maryland, Montgomery County, and the City of Rockville, has not adopted a Vision Zero Plan. (Vision Zero is a strategy to eliminate all traffic fatalities and severe injuries, while increasing safe, healthy, equitable mobility for all.) Will you lead or support and fund efforts to put in place a Gaithersburg Vision Zero plan?

**A5. “Strategies” and “Plans” are useless without proper execution, funding, and resolve. I support the aims and goals of Vision Zero, but the plan as a plan itself has not delivered on its lofty promises. I’m for what works, and for making sure plans and strategies get fully implemented, adopted, and funded. Not just turned into documents that mostly sit on a shelf to make us “feel good”. Sadly, we’ve had pedestrian deaths in Gaithersburg, and I take the safety and security of all our residents personally and seriously. I’ll work to make a difference here.**

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

**A6. We live in the Kentlands. A great community that is walkable, cycling friendly, and boasts a shopping main street with lots of options (restaurants, movie theaters, amazing coffee shops, etc.). We are also lucky to have a great brewery in Saints Row where I can bring my pup and enjoy a nice cold sour style beer. When I make the world's best [Guineítos en Escabeche](#)\* (no modesty here 😊), I head to the Latin Market in Olde Towne, where they have the greenest bananas (a must for this dish!).**

Q7: Gaithersburg residents have identified routes including Goshen Road, Centerway Road, Woodfield Road/MD 124, Montgomery Village Ave, and parts of Snouffer School Road as “very hazardous to cyclists due to having no shoulder/bike lane with heavy and fast traffic. All these roads are major connectors between common areas to cycle.” How would you tackle safety on these roads and other Gaithersburg roads like them?

**A7. Some of these roads or major parts of them are outside the city limits. So, our ability to improve them, rests on our influence with the appropriate stakeholders (e.g., County, State, other municipalities, etc.). I’m committed to working with all of them to advocate for improved safety. In some areas within the city, side paths may be a more feasible approach than PBL for example. For completeness sake, side paths and PBLs are only part of the picture. Several intersections and crosswalks need higher visibility and safety improvements. On roads that the City can control and elsewhere, I take an all of the above approach, and will advocate for what works.**

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Q8. What is your target for the proportion of Gaithersburg's Capital Improvement Program transportation budget that should be allocated to pedestrian and bicycle improvements? How might the city better tap state and federal funding for projects?

**A8. I don't think a fixed percentage for any CIP is the right approach. Some phases (years) may mean a higher percentage while other times it may lessen (depending on competing priorities, funding, taxes, economy, and other factors that need to be taken into account). That said, the current funding levels are lower than I would like. In the end, the percentage of the CIP should be driven by the quality, urgency, and potential improvement that will be delivered. As for tapping additional (i.e., non tax sourced) funding, I have personal experience navigating through complexities of the grant writing process. I think the City can (and if I am elected) will do more to seek, find, and apply for any/all funding sources that can be had, to include private sources if applicable.**

Q9. How should Bus Rapid Transit on MD 355 mesh with bicycle and pedestrian improvements? How will you work with the Maryland State Highway Administration to promote bicycle and pedestrian improvements on Gaithersburg's other state roads, MD 28, MD 117, MD 119, and MD 124?

**A9. It's a careful balancing act for sure. The Lakeforest Mall redevelopment includes plans for a new transit center that is located closer to MD 355 and more accessible to the BRT route(s) while maintaining harmony with pedestrians and cyclists. As to how I will work with SHA and other stakeholders, there are three parts to my answer. First, it's crucial to have good relationships with our state and county leaders. I'm proud to have the endorsements of the D17 delegation (Sen. Kagan, Del. Palakovich Carr, Del. Vogel, and Del. Spiegel), as well as D2 County Councilmember Balcombe. I have good working relationships with them and other key stakeholders. Secondly, with SHA (also MCDOT), it's a prod and prod approach, in a polite, diplomatic, but persistent manner. Most of the SHA/MCDOT nuts and bolts interactions happen at the staff level, and I'll make sure our City Staff are well resourced and supported in their efforts to further Gaithersburg priorities. Finally, our federal partners can be further advocated to for transit assistance and otherwise.**

Q10. Do you support bi-directional, full-day MARC Brunswick Line service? Do you support or oppose creation of the Midcounty Highway Extended (M-83)?

**A10. This is the easiest of your questions! On MARC, yes. This is a no-brainer. But really, it's a travesty that Gaithersburg doesn't also have local METRO Rail access as well. I have seen Northern Virginia invest much more in transit, and get METRO Rail up to Dulles (in addition to other transit improvements). Meanwhile our mass transit options in Gaithersburg and the Up County have stagnated, not been funded fully, and are sorely lacking. It frustrates me to no end how little progress has been made. On M-83, I don't have strong feelings one-way or another. I would like to see METRO Rail in Gaithersburg sooner rather than later.**

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\*Proof: Made on every holiday season, and throughout the year!

