

**Pen-Mar Regional Association of REALTORS® Candidates Questionnaire
City of Hagerstown Mayor and Council Primary Election 2009**

Candidate Name: *William M. Breichner, Sr.*
Party Affiliation: *Democrat*
Incumbent: *NO*

1. The City of Hagerstown receives a substantial allocation of federal funds for community development, as well as a portion of the hotel/motel tax revenue collected by Washington County for economic development activities. Do you believe these funds are spent in an effective manner? If so, explain.

Because CDBG funds are controlled by regulations established by HUD, I must assume the funds are being spent in accordance with their guidelines. However, I am concerned about such things as houses purchased under home ownership programs that are not selling and the size of staff in CDBG.

I am also concerned about where the hotel/motel tax revenue is being used. For instance, I do not believe it should be used to pay for a federal lobbyist or outside marketing firms.

2. If not, how might these resources be put to better use?

I believe the housing units that the CDBG has not been able to sell should be placed with a real estate sales firm or firms. Perhaps a sell/lease plan could be developed that would be more affordable to senior citizens as well as to low income citizens. The hotel-motel tax revenue should be used to assist worthy development efforts. A major portion of these dollars could be placed in a special fund for that purpose. They could be used for long term, low interest loans.

3. City property owners have found compliance with the Property Management Code to be challenging, and at times the PMC to be inconsistently applied. What suggestions do you have to remedy this situation? Would you support the creation of a City-sponsored task force or other mechanism to address these concerns?

Having received a number of citizen complaints, I believe we have to review that program. Since the Homeowners Association was involved in the creation of this program, we should involve them in such a review. Attention should be given to life safety issues and not such items as cracked curbs, grass growing in the sidewalks, or other minor infractions.

Pen-Mar Regional Association of REALTORS® Questionnaire

Candidate: *William M. Breichner*

4. In general, do you think that the City provides adequate incentives and regulatory support to generate private investment within its boundaries?

No. I have been a proponent of freezing tax assessments for significant improvement projects. The term of this freeze would be based on the value of the improvements. Proposed plan improvements and inspections should be given prompt attention; fees should be reimbursed upon successful completion of the project. In addition, for significant projects, a contribution could be made (from the City's portion of hotel-motel tax revenue) as a grant or long term loan for the proposed fund reserve.

5. "It takes a village" to prompt change in a local economy. How might the business community assist the City with revitalization efforts?

- 1. Be active in promoting a positive City image.**
- 2. Keep the City EDC office informed of problems that affect their business as well as to recommend possible new or expanding business opportunities.**
- 3. Maintain the appearance of their business properties: keeping them attractive and clean!**
- 4. Helping to elect good city leaders.**
- 5. Become active on City boards & commissions and attend meetings of City Council and various boards; become an active voice in local issues.**

6. The homeownership rate within the City lags well behind that of the County, and the incidence of foreclosures is at the highest in the 21740 zip code (much of which is within the City). How might the City effectively address these challenges?

Work to improve neighborhoods and to promote home ownership is the only answer. Perhaps Habitat for Humanity or Interfaith Housing could acquire and rehabilitate dwellings instead of building new homes on vacant lots. Unlike the CDBG program, which must pay contractors to rehabilitate old structures, these agencies use volunteer labor, contributions and sweat equity by the prospective home owner.

Pen-Mar Regional Association of REALTORS® Questionnaire
Candidate: Breichner

7. Property owners within the City pay substantially more real property taxes than do owners outside the municipal boundaries. Why should future homeowners choose to live within the City? Do residents “get their money’s worth”?

Currently the City receives dollars from the County which represents a credit for certain duplicated services. The current program involves credit for police, parks and roads. This money goes into the City’s general fund which helps keep the City’s tax rate low. However, the City’s tax payers do not directly see the effect of this reimbursement. I believe it would be better if the County tax bills would be reduced for the amount currently reimbursed to the City’s general fund.

Incidentally, there are a number of other services that are duplicated such as engineering, finance, legal, code enforcement, so the current dollar amount received by the City should be higher. The City’s fear is that if the County reduced their tax rate of the City and eliminated the reimbursement, they may have to either raise the City tax rate or reduce the budget.

**Pen-Mar Regional Association of REALTORS® Candidates Questionnaire
City of Hagerstown Mayor and Council Primary Election 2009**

Candidate Name: Dan Mohar

Party Affiliation: Republican

Incumbent: YES NO

1. The City of Hagerstown receives a substantial allocation of federal funds for community development, as well as a portion of the hotel/motel tax revenue collected by Washington County for economic development activities. Do you believe these funds are spent in an effective manner? If so, explain.

We need to look long term and not just what looks good in the paper tomorrow. So many projects are can be beneficial; however, they need to be followed through. Too much money has been wasted starting a project and not seeing it through completion. The future of the city is tomorrow not today.

2. If not, how might these resources be put to better use?

See above response.

3. City property owners have found compliance with the Property Management Code to be challenging, and at times the PMC to be inconsistently applied. What suggestions do you have to remedy this situation? Would you support the creation of a City-sponsored task force or other mechanism to address these concerns?

This is one of the main issues needing addressed. When the PMC was established it was a good program. Over time the local government has taken over to be "big brother". There are too many codes and regulations. The inspectors are to work with the property owner; not control and harass them. The property owners are having to spend so much money on needless fees and unnecessary maintenance they are opting to sell their properties and looking for units outside of the city limites. I hear and see the problems the property owners are confronted with daily. Our development has been hindered, tenants are paying higher rent, and more property owners are feeling the financial stress and burdens of ownership. This is one my greatest concerns and needs to be rectified immediately. I do support a task force or other options to make these necessary changes.

Pen-Mar Regional Association of REALTORS® Candidates Questionnaire
Candidate: Mohar

4. In general, do you think that the City provides adequate incentives and regulatory support to generate private investment within its boundaries?

No, I do not. The incentives for private investment are beneficial to a chosen few not the majority of investors. This is another instance that government is too involved. We can not follow the same direction as our state and federal governments. We need to give power to the people and partner with them. We need to work with investors and property owners so they can succeed and prosper...resulting in the our city succeeding and prospering.

5. "It takes a village" to prompt change in a local economy. How might the business community assist the City with revitalization efforts?

We need to work together. I am optimistic about our future and I believe the economy will recover. I think it has to be the city assisting the business community. The city revitalization needs to begin with cleaning up our streets and beautify our city. I think the city can offer incentives to our business owners to enhance the appearance of their buildings and make them more appealing. We also need to encourage investors to consider development of vacant buildings.

6. The homeownership rate within the City lags well behind that of the County, and the incidence of foreclosures is at the highest in the 21740 zip code (much of which is within the City). How might the City effectively address these challenges?

Bad loans and homeowners overextending their finances is what caused the foreclosure crisis. The government felt is what the right of all American people to own a home; however, that is a privilege and result of hard work and wise money decisions. The government urged lenders to allow most anybody to borrow for a home and borrow more than they could actually afford. As hard as it is for those going through foreclosure it can be the perfect opportunity for others. Now is an ideal time for first time homebuyers and investors to purchase homes and a lower cost with lower interest. I would like to see our city leaders work with investors and residents wanting to buy a home by offering incentives to qualified buyers. The government should aide in this challenge without taking control.

Pen-Mar Regional Association of REALTORS® Questionnaire
Candidate: Mohar

7. Property owners within the City pay substantially more real property taxes than do owners outside the municipal boundaries. Why should future homeowners choose to live within the City? Do residents “get their money’s worth”?

We need to make changes for future homeowners to attract them to purchase a home within the city limits. City residents are taxed by both the city and county resulting in very high property taxes. This is not appealing to those looking to buy a home. We need have a resolution to the double tax. We also need to look at the rate of city utilities. As they stand now, we are paying far more than our actual usage of both electric and water. My home is on the city/county line. My next neighbor is a resident of the county while I am in the city limits. I am paying double taxes and the only benefit I see is our garbage is picked up at no additional charge. I don't see where I or other city residents benefit from this double taxation and certainly do not get their money's worth.

**Pen-Mar Regional Association of REALTORS® Candidates Questionnaire
City of Hagerstown Mayor and Council Primary Election 2009**

Candidate Name: Joseph A. Marschner

Party Affiliation: Democrat

Incumbent: ___YES _X_ NO

1. The City of Hagerstown receives a substantial allocation of federal funds for community development, as well as a portion of the hotel/motel tax revenue collected by Washington County for economic development activities. Do you believe these funds are spent in an effective manner? If so, explain.

Please see below.

2. If not, how might these resources be put to better use?

I believe the Business Revolving Loan Fund has seen some success, but is underused. I was glad to see that in December the mayor and council voted to budget 350,000.00 for the "Upper Floors Redevelopment Fund," and to implement it, but the vote to implement the plan passed by a narrow 3-2 margin. This fund should be strengthened. We should also begin to find uses for the Economic Redevelopment fund, which was untouched last fiscal year. I have noticed that in the current budget, every line item proposed for economic development has stayed the same or gone up (including salaries) except for "general expenses" and "economic incentives," while a key performance indicator - "Number of establishments contacted under industry and business retention program" - has gone from fifty to thirty. I don't think we should be spending more for less. Rather, now is the time to be MORE aggressive. I think this is perfect time to be offering "economic incentives" to businesses looking to move OUT of locations that can't offer such incentives, and into our city. We should not be reducing line items that can help us attract investment and people to our city.

3. City property owners have found compliance with the Property Management Code to be challenging, and at times the PMC to be inconsistently applied. What suggestions do you have to remedy this situation? Would you support the creation of a City-sponsored task force or other mechanism to address these concerns?

As I have met with property owners and business owners throughout the city, one recurring theme keeps popping up - code compliance and enforcement. I do believe this issue should be looked into. the PMC should be applied in a consistent fashion, and it should not present undue challenges to property owners. I would support a

City-sponsored task force on this issue because I believe we have to treat city property owners as valued customers, rather than treating them like a group of misbehaving children who need to be made to "toe the line."

4. In general, do you think that the City provides adequate incentives and regulatory support to generate private investment within its boundaries?

No. As I have said above, we need to do more and be more aggressive with our economic development policies. Government cannot grow businesses or create jobs. The only thing it can do is HELP the private sector to do this. Our local schools need to provide the educated workforce that employers desire, our local government can provide business-friendly city services

5. "It takes a village" to prompt change in a local economy. How might the business community assist the City with revitalization efforts?

It is really the business community that has to "take charge" of revitalization. The city government can help, with tax incentives such as temporary abatements, various tax credits and TIF strategies, but it will take the private sector to really do the bulk of the revitalization.

6. The homeownership rate within the City lags well behind that of the County, and the incidence of foreclosures is at the highest in the 21740 zip code (much of which is within the City). How might the City effectively address these challenges?

We have got to do more to bring high wage jobs INTO the city. The new economy is all about "knowledge workers," and these jobs will drive the city's future. Interestingly, the trend for knowledge workers nationwide is to move back INTO an urban area that has the amenities to make an urban life interesting. Hagerstown has momentum in this area, and this is how we will transform underutilized properties into homes owned by those who live here.

7. Property owners within the City pay substantially more real property taxes than do owners outside the municipal boundaries. Why should future homeowners choose to live within the City? Do residents "get their money's worth"?

I do believe residents get their money's worth. Fire insurance (hazard insurance) rates can be substantially lower due to the proximity of fire stations and the number of fire hydrants in the city. Also, garbage removal and recycling, in addition to Christmas tree pick-up and bulk trash removal are provided. When all of this is factored in, it can actually be MORE costly to live in the county than in the city.

**Pen-Mar Regional Association of REALTORS®
PRIMARY CANDIDATES QUESTIONNAIRE
2009 Hagerstown Mayoral and City Council Elections**

Candidate Name: David Lidz

Party Affiliation: Democrat

Incumbent: NO

1. The City of Hagerstown receives a substantial allocation of federal funds for community development, as well as a portion of the hotel/motel tax revenue collected by Washington County for economic development activities. Do you believe these funds are spent in an effective manner? If so, explain.
2. If not, how might these resources be put to better use?
3. City property owners have found compliance with the Property Management Code to be challenging, and at times the PMC to be inconsistently applied. What suggestions do you have to remedy this situation? Would you support the creation of a City-sponsored task force or other mechanism to address these concerns?

This is the very issue that got me to thinking about running for City Council in the first place. I am a Realtor and an investor myself, and I have a good deal of experience with Code Enforcement in Baltimore City. I recently started increasing my investment activity in Hagerstown, and found the following alarming realities:

- **Experienced, reputable, conscientious investors and contractors working within the City of Hagerstown *without exception* view Code Enforcement and permitting as a serious & costly problem;**
- **Investors considering Hagerstown quite often back away because of the perception of three significant liabilities or risks – (1) antagonistic or bureaucratic Code enforcement; (2) double property taxation; (3) financial returns (cap rates) are marginal to begin with;**
- **The problem – real *and* perceived – with Code enforcement, is one aspect of a broader housing policy that lacks cohesion and is detached from economic realities.**

In Baltimore I have witnessed how overly-zealous Code enforcement leads to exactly the opposite outcome that is intended by the implementation of housing regulation. That is, when inspectors disproportionately sanction reputable investors (the “good-guys-and-gals” who are providing a necessary supply of affordable, safe rental housing) and completely miss the “slum-lords-and-

ladies” who dodge the system (by, for example, rehabbing their properties at nights and on week-ends without permits), the effect is to encourage investors to choose to work outside of the Code enforcement and permitting system. The policy ends up encouraging investors to “go ghetto.”

I am discovering that a similar trend exists here in Hagerstown.

What do I propose to do about it?

- I support a wholesale review of the permitting process, Code regulations, and the way inspectors exercise discretion in enforcement. To some extent, reform is already underway – I have heard Mike Heyser state that his department is reviewing some of the “nit-pickier” standards it has been imposing, such as requiring permits to replace small plumbing fixtures. Also, the current Council has approved the purchase of software to manage building permit, code compliance and land development processes. This software will expedite the issuance of permits and integrate the various disciplines within Code and Zoning departments, thereby addressing one of the chief complaints of real estate stakeholders – the unreasonable time delays caused by the existing permitting process. These are steps taken in the right direction, and I will continue to push for these kinds of reforms and improvements. But I will also work with Code enforcement officials to find a way to exercise appropriate regulatory discretion – we need to find a way to direct enforcement zeal toward negligent land-lords, and to find a more cooperative spirit in dealing with owner-occupants and investors who are working to do right.
- I will invite property-owners to bring complaints and concerns directly to me, and I will personally investigate situations brought to my attention. Additionally, I will offer to meet or even mediate with all parties – I’ll sit at a round-table with Code enforcement officials and aggrieved property owners - before these situations make their way the front page of the Herald-Mail.
- I will meet with Neighborhoods 1st organizations, and implement a system to bring them into the loop. Some of the more startling situations we have heard about (i.e. elderly or even cantankerous homeowners getting 4-figure fines for refusing or failing to mow-down weeds growing through sidewalk cracks), I believe could be brought to the attention of such community groups. These associations may be able to abate problems without the heavy hand of the regulators coming down. There may also be opportunities for these groups to work with landlords in their communities to solve problems in a cooperative rather than a confrontational manner – and such endeavors of course will help these community organizations achieve other stated goals, i.e. interaction with homeowners & landlords, maintenance of clean, healthy neighborhood environments, acquaintance with renters.

**Pen-Mar Regional Association of REALTORS® Questionnaire
Candidate: Lidz**

4. In general, do you think that the City provides adequate incentives and regulatory support to generate private investment within its boundaries?

Recent City leaders, and more importantly, private investors should be commended for public/private cooperative efforts pursued to attract and grow Hagerstown businesses, and to renovate old, crumbling blocks and buildings. But I also believe it is time for a new phase, a new strategy which at once builds upon the past successes while correcting shortcomings and recognizing new realities.

One rather startling shortcoming is the absolute lack of cogent vision, or unity of purpose, among the current elected officials with respect to building a new economic vitality for Hagerstown. This is a major plank of my platform, and I have a pretty well-developed argument about this shortcoming, and I believe I have a cogent vision along with specific ideas about how to pursue that vision. I also have the energy, the work ethic, and the commitment to keeping my word to get it done, to lead the way.

I will be sharing these views and ideas at the appropriate upcoming forums and press events.

5. “It takes a village” to prompt change in a local economy. How might the business community assist the City with revitalization efforts?

At this point I will only say that I am working with local businesses to develop this “village” approach to leading Hagerstown into prosperous and healthy future – and I will be presenting some exciting details before the primary...

6. The homeownership rate within the City lags well behind that of the County, and the incidence of foreclosures is at the highest in the 21740 zip code (much of which is within the City). How might the City effectively address these challenges?

I see this economic turmoil we as a nation are enduring not as the end of days, but as an opportunity to correct misguided governmental policies and short-sighted business practices and, more importantly, to build a better future. The foreclosure crisis is a great example of that. 21740 has a lot more foreclosures working their way through the system than current statistics are showing, and when all is said and done, Hagerstown will be faced with an inventory of hundreds of vacant, institutionally-owned residential properties.

But, there is an opportunity here; an opportunity to couple local solutions with the implementation of the federal stimulus and foreclosure relief packages; but an opportunity which, again, is being missed, or handled in a piecemeal, reactive fashion.

With the right leadership, vision, and market-based strategies, the City – with federal cooperation – could act as a conduit to get these vacant homes off of the books of the struggling financial institutions, and into the hands of the desirable and productive end-users, such as first time homebuyers and conscientious, well-capitalized investors; this housing transference could even be offered to workers of businesses and industries we are trying to get to relocate to the City, thereby strengthening the greater policy goal of building a new economy for Hagerstown.

Again, I have specific ideas – for example, right now there are 4 Freddie Mac REO's listed right here in Hagerstown listed with prices totaling about \$814K. Why not have Freddie Mac turn those over to the City at a price of \$400K, and have the federal government finance the transfer - hold the note, if you will? With the right political maneuvering we could do this with HUD, VA, Fannie Mae & FDIC properties without ever having to have cash change hands. In a sense, what this would be is Hagerstown gaining title to a portfolio of REO's at rock-bottom prices through seller financing (the “seller” being the Federal Gov't). It is a strategy that savvy investors are pursuing in the current market...

...and it's what I mean about having vision, ideas, energy in government, but having the business perspective to know how to use market-based strategies to get vital assets out of the hands of failed institutions and into the hands of private, local stakeholders who can bring new, productive life to these properties.

...and it's what I mean by thinking about the problems and opportunities at hand in a holistic, comprehensive, cogent manner.

7. Property owners within the City pay substantially more real property taxes than do owners outside the municipal boundaries. Why should future homeowners choose to live within the City? Do residents “get their money's worth”?

It's a tough question, made tougher by the reality that there's not too much the City can do about this problem without the cooperation of the County. I have some ideas here too, some of which have to do with my economic vision and plan – i.e. some new economic benefits we could create that would REALLY cause City residents to feel they “get their money's worth.” Again, not quite ready to uncloak these ---

--- but, as for the double taxation issue, it's a political fight that will ultimately have to be won in the political arena. The double property tax is bad policy; it's unfair to City residents and what we need are articulate yet temperate voices who can make the case and win the day. It probably could be argued that eloquence,

persuasiveness, and temperance have been some of the qualities missing in the Hagerstown public affairs arena. I believe I will help remedy that...

**Pen-Mr Regional Association of REALTORS® Candidates Questionnaire
City of Hagerstown Mayor and Council Primary Election 2009**

Candidate Name: Forrest Easton

Party Affiliation: Republican

Incumbent: ___ YES X NO

1. The City of Hagerstown receives a substantial allocation of federal funds for community development, as well as a portion of the hotel/motel tax revenue collected by Washington County for economic development activities. Do you believe these funds are spent in an effective manner? If so, explain.

Currently it is my understanding that Federal Funds through CDBG and to a lesser degree Hotel/Motel funds have limitations on how they can be spent. Usually the CDBG are used and spent in areas that are in the most need. Regarding the Hotel/Motel funds; the City of Hagerstown continues to fund tourism related activities. The reception of the Hotel/Motel funds is a fairly new concept so I believe the City is still working out the flaws. So I guess my overall answer would be yes they are being used in an effective manner however, progress could still be made.

2. If not, how might these resources be put to better use?

If there are deficiencies' in the current system I believe they would be that the City has not focused on reinvestment on the larger downtown buildings. I also believe that the City has not done enough to create neighborhood based programs to encourage home ownership in all neighborhoods.

As a City Council Person I would build a working relationship with the County. This will allow increased discussions and compromises on an increase of the Hotel/Motel funds. Hopefully these discussions can allow the City to get a larger and more appropriate percentage of the Hotel/Motel tax funds.

However, I believe that the most important issue that needs to be examined is that of True Tax Equity from the County. Currently the City receives approximately \$1.2 million from county in tax equity funds. This should be and needs to be increased due to the duplication of services that are provided by the City of Hagerstown for their residents.

Pen-Mar Regional Association of REALTORS® Questionnaire
Candidate: Easton

3. City property owners have found compliance with the Property Management Code to be challenging, and at times the PMC to be inconsistently applied. What suggestions do you have to remedy this situation? Would you support the creation of a City-sponsored task force or other mechanism to address these concerns?

The first issue that needs to be examined and enforced is that if the code is going to exist it needs to be followed consistently. If the current code is written in a fashion that is confusing I would suggest for the code to be re-written. It is very important that if the City of Hagerstown wants their property owners to be able to follow rules/regulations; these rules/regulations need to be easy to understand and easy to follow.

The Property Management Code currently has an oversight board which would be the Board of Technical Appeal. With that said, I am a firm believer that city residents should be encouraged to assist the City with oversight and assistance when it is possible. If the current code is not being used appropriately and/or the current oversight group is not working properly I would encourage a volunteer lead task force to examine the current code and make recommendations of change(s).

I also believe that the Code Compliance needs to be changed to be followed by homeowners, business owners, vacant, and/or occupied buildings. The current code seems to lack the current structure to be influential in areas that it is most needed. For example, the owners of the old Wendy's and the extension of the Venice Inn on Dual Hwy. These eyesores are in a high traffic area into the City and no improvements have been made for years.

4. In general, do you think that the City provides adequate incentives and regulatory support to generate private investment within its boundaries?

The City does to a degree that it is financially capable of doing so. However, I believe that this could always improve through tax credits and low/no interest loans for serious business owners.

The larger issue is the treatment that business owners and employers receive from the current administration. The city has to improve the current process of inspections and issuing building permits. An investor is not willing to wait 1 ½ years to do simple upgrades to properties.

5. "It takes a village" to prompt change in a local economy. How might the business community assist the City with revitalization efforts?

The business community is only able to assist the City if and when the City administration is ready to move the City forward and to work with others. The first thing that needs to occur is that the City needs to cooperate and compromise with business owners to develop plans for the City. It is time for the City administration to work with and take suggestions from the people that engage in business and put business plans together on a day to day basis.

I am a firm believer that if the downtown is to be revitalized, parking should be the key priority. The City needs to work with business owners to increase parking availability in the downtown. An example of this would be the cooperation that occurred with Don Bowman with the parking deck in the Arts and Entertainment District. Without appropriate parking the City will never be able to utilize the over 1 million square feet of vacant space in the City. After the parking is addressed and a plan is enacted to improve, we should move forward in providing low interest loans and/or tax incentives with putting in elevators to allow these properties to be ADA approved.

6. The homeownership rate within the City lags well behind that of the County, and the incidence of foreclosures is at the highest in the 21740 zip code (much of which is within the City). How might the City effectively address these challenges?

The City needs to continue to emphasize programs like Neighborhoods 1st that promotes pride and inclusion within neighborhoods. The City needs to continue to promote the Home store and all of the great programs they offer first time homeowner's incentives. The City needs to work with, instead of against current and future investors that are willing to build and redevelop property within the City. I would promote a better advertising effort for the City of Hagerstown. As a community we need to work to improve the negative perception of Hagerstown, especially in the downtown area.

I would also explore the possibilities of other programs that have worked across the country. One such program allows neighborhoods to collaborate with the City and other investors to purchase dilapidated homes, fix them up, resell them, and all parties split the proceeds. These proceeds can be used in continuing the effort to better that neighborhood through sidewalks, parks, ect.

I again need to raise the issue of True Tax Equity with the county. I would work with the County to provide increased funding to the City. I would use this tax equity funding to lower the tax rate in the city instead of spending it on pet projects.

Pen-Mar Regional Association of REALTORS® Questionnaire
Candidate: Easton

7. Property owners within the City pay substantially more real property taxes than do owners outside the municipal boundaries. Why should future homeowners choose to live within the City? Do residents “get their money’s worth”?

The two major attractions to live within the City limits are public safety and regulations for property upkeep. The City of Hagerstown offers a very safe place to live and work. The City has approximately 120 sworn officers for 40,000 citizens as opposed to 100 deputies for 150,000 residents in a much larger area. The City is also blessed to have a paid fire department. I believe City residents are reassured by knowing that your neighbors have to keep up their properties as opposed to having tall grass, vehicles up on blocks in their yards, and other undesirable issues within unregulated areas of the county.

Other incentives to live in the City limits are Water/Sewer rates at about ½ the cost of County residents; a cheaper rate for electricity for most city residents; cheaper homeowners insurance; garbage and recycling at a fraction of the cost of county residents; the use of the annual dumpster program; and reduced rates at City owned parks and recreational areas.

I do believe that most city residents “get their money’s worth” however, this should always be improving. We need to always be looking at additional incentives for the City residents. In closing I again would like to state the importance for True Tax Equity from the county so that it can be used to lower the tax rate which in turn would decrease the gap of real property tax that City residence currently pay.

**Pen-Mar Regional Association of REALTORS® Candidates Questionnaire
City of Hagerstown Mayor and Council Primary Election 2009**

Candidate Name:

Martin Brubaker

Party Affiliation: Democratic

Incumbent: YES NO

1. The City of Hagerstown receives a substantial allocation of federal funds for community development, as well as a portion of the hotel/motel tax revenue collected by Washington County for economic development activities. Do you believe these funds are spent in an effective manner? If so, explain.

CDBG funds are currently allocated to a wide variety of activities. Public hearings are held on proposed disposition of these funds. Currently, there is a wide mixture of approved CDBG projects and activities. I am always ready to listen to new initiatives. However, barring new funding, I remain cognizant that adjustments would need to be made elsewhere, either with CDBG or general funds (see question #7). Any new proposition, including public-private partnerships, should demonstrate its relative value and/or pay back before replacing another.

Hotel/motel revenues channeled to the municipalities are relatively new. As I understand it, many existing City activities are already eligible for these funds. Any earmarking of these funds for new activities adds to the budget burden carried by general taxpayers (see question #7). Nevertheless, the City has undertaken new economic development initiatives such as the upper floors and web-site marketing programs.

2. If not, how might these resources be put to better use? **See above**

3. City property owners have found compliance with the Property Management Code to be challenging, and at times the PMC to be inconsistently applied. What suggestions do you have to remedy this situation? Would you support the creation of a City-sponsored task force or other mechanism to address these concerns?

Presented with tangible examples of code and/or bureaucratic hang-ups that go beyond general allegations, I would consider a Task Force, especially if it could forward- focus on developing innovative concepts for effective rehabilitation/re-use of our many older structures, downtown or elsewhere. I have had many discussions with property owners/lease holders over the past several years. Generally, I have

found that most substantive problems arise from requests for special dispensations that staff members find difficult to accommodate. I would agree that sometimes timeliness and clarity of communication have been problems. I remain open to specific proposals with a developed rationale.

4. In general, do you think that the City provides adequate incentives and regulatory support to generate private investment within its boundaries?

I do not believe we have yet found the answer for downtown, although a major part of that problem is a population size/disposable income/urban cultural affinity that does not begin to match those same factors available to urban centers east of the mountains. A main issue downtown is that market lease rates do not pay back the cost of renovations. A wide variety of special loans and tax incentives are currently available; perhaps these could be communicated more effectively or packaged more efficiently.

I believe the quality of shopping centers built in the last few years (Best-Buy/Stone House Square,etc.) at the outer edges of the City demonstrate that we can obtain quality investment and good results on the ground. The Planning Commission has developed new zoning categories such as Professional Office Mixed Use/Neighborhood Mixed Use/ and Industrial Mixed Use to provide more Land Uses adaptable to modern situations. Residential parking requirements have been reduced downtown. Meanwhile, the City is about to approve incentives for green development.

I do believe that the City and the County EDC need to enhance our ability to find and reach out to R & D/professional/general office type investment. If we are to truly improve our economic base, long-term, this is a direction we must take.

5. “It takes a village” to prompt change in a local economy. How might the business community assist the City with revitalization efforts?

Intangible -attitude – please don’t quietly support moving institutions and businesses outside the urban core, then complain about lack of success downtown, lament city taxes and government, berate conditions, and in same conversation ask for City tax support towards a favorite cause.

Tangible –commitment - be willing to make investments in the City beyond a green field short-term business model. For instance, if downtown business desires more parking facilities be willing to assist with a portion of capital costs, a parking district, long term contracts for spaces, or guaranteed building renovations. It’s a stretch to ask the general taxpayer to support the difference between rates and cost amortization without some of the commitments listed above. If in the end there is not a net gain from business generated, incentives are to no avail. There many

examples between these two, such as property owners unwilling to perform maintenance to keep valued tenants. I know and strongly support the need for business activity – but it needs to be a mutual outreach, lest question #7 rear its head once again.

6. The homeownership rate within the City lags well behind that of the County, and the incidence of foreclosures is at the highest in the 21740 zip code (much of which is within the City). How might the City effectively address these challenges?

Yes, the City recognizes the need for a higher ratio of home ownership. Yet when we approve higher density urban development many of the units appear to be snapped up by investors. We have installed an annual tax cap for homeowners and continue to offer loan programs for ownership at the lower end of the market. On the other side of the equation, people revitalizing their owner-occupied units in inner City neighborhoods must be reinforced with a safe environment, attractive surroundings, and strong code enforcement for the surrounding rental properties.

The Federal government must take the lead on the foreclosure issue. Programs are already being put into place to deal with the 21740 zip code. The City should stay alert to the formation of problem blocks or even areas and keep in touch with remedies offered through State or Federal programs. We need to make sure that this issue does not lead to the problem of blighted neighborhoods and that City residents receive any advantages

7. Property owners within the City pay substantially more real property taxes than do owners outside the municipal boundaries. Why should future homeowners choose to live within the City? Do residents “get their money’s worth”?

In return for municipal taxes the City property owner gets more individualized attention to problems, prompt response to public safety matters, higher quality infrastructure, available utilities at a lower rate, garbage collection, community based activities, and the opportunity to more directly influence laws, regulations, and programs needed in an urban community.

That said, the City taxpayer pays a full County tax, supporting projects and activities from Sandy Hook to Sideling Hill. On top of that tax they pay City tax for professional police and fire departments needed in an urban center, construction and maintenance of streets and roads, City parks, and as well as planning, permits, and other oversight functions. The cost is about \$40 million. The rebate from the County is about \$1.6 million or \$40 for every City resident. Every capital investment from the County is subject to bargaining or quid pro swaps, even though the City represents 25-30% of the County population and 20-25% of the tax base. So let me rephrase the question – does a City taxpayer “get their money’s worth” from the County? The same issue extends to capital projects – for instance, the City is

sharing costs with the County for a portion of the State project for improvements to the Dual Highway at Edgewood. Thus a middle income City homeowner pays twice and incurs the same actual cost as a luxury home owner farther out Mt. Aetna road beyond the city limits. Yet, if the City does not expand it loses prime property tax base and stagnates.

If one were to abolish the City altogether and even assume 10-25 % cost savings (most of which will not be available in the real world of tasks that would be transferred), the tax increase for County residents would be enormous. I will continue to work towards a more equitable arrangement with the County while attempting to find defensible means of reducing the City property tax rate, especially when favorable economic conditions and City growth resumes.

I encourage the business community to truly work with the City, respect its situation, help seek points of agreement that can move us all forward, recognize that substantial County financial participation is necessary and justified, and finally realize that urban centers, not suburban sprawl, are the direction of the future.