

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

**Candidate Name:** Bob Bruchey

**Party Affiliation:** Republican

**Incumbent:** X 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.

**Yes.**

**The Federal funds that we receive benefit low income families and blighted areas. This allows us to significantly enhance our lower income neighborhoods and allow for upgrades that benefit the entire County. Hotel/Motel tax money is very restrictive in its use. We must account for any money spent, just like the County and the CVB. We can utilize these funds as we see fit as long as we enhance tourism efforts. These funds may be used for events such as Western Maryland Blues Fest, Augustoberfest and Holly Festival. I believe that we utilize these funds as required and I look forward to supplementing our General fund with more Hotel/Motel tax in the future to permit us to grow our events and add to the quality of life for our citizens. Keep in mind, this is the first year that any other entity other the County and CVB have received Hotel/Motel tax money. To date, the city has only received \$49,500.00**

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 a delicate area. I, back in 2002, signed the petition against the Landlord Registration legislation. I at the time felt that the City had adequate legislation in place to enforce code violations and safety hazards in rental properties. The problem was we didn't use them. I often hear the**

complaints, particularly around spring when the grass begins to grow in the sidewalks. Since I have been back in office, March 2006, I have made it mandatory that we ensure our sidewalks are weed and grass free. Now, having said that, we don't always comply. And, there are several major areas around the city that we cannot enforce this particular code violation, CSX RR comes to mind. I have expressed my concern to the head of the department and we have had some changes. I look forward to not only tweaking this department if elected, but to look also at the relaxation of non-safety codes in our older buildings. The inability of a developer to rehabilitate an older piece of property due to the current codes and cost of compliance is debilitating to our over all efforts of economic development. I have had numerous conversations with our engineering department about our inability to relax codes that are non-safety issues so we can see some progress in our rehabilitation efforts. We are either going to be a city of re-use, or tear down. I would explore the creation of a task force to look at how our Code Compliance Dept. applies the codes and how we can be more consistent and customer friendly.

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

I believe that we must continue to explore every incentive that gives our private investors and businesses the chance to succeed. Recently I introduced legislation that would create the Upper Floor Redevelopment Revolving Loan Fund. This fund will create low interest loans that could become grants if certain criteria are met. This fund will establish a low interest loan for;

- a. HVAC needs
- b. Fire Suppression needs
- c. ADA requirements

All of the above are expensive necessities of rehabilitation.

Couple this initiative with the Revolving Loan Fund and the Sign and Façade Grant program that I initiated during my first term, 1997-2001 and you have possibilities that never existed prior to 1997. The tax credit programs that we have in place are also very helpful in fulfilling a developer's dream of creating a working environment for future businesses. I recently received approval from the City Council to move forward with my marketing initiative. This program will put Hagerstown and Washington County on the National map. We are pursuing developing a web site that will be all inclusive. The city currently does an adequate job at marketing itself within the 4 state region. It is time to become aggressive so we can market ourselves across the nation, even globally.

**This program will create a web presence and a hard marketing program that will enable a CEO, sitting in a chair in Kansas City MO., to access our site, get all the information i.e. what properties are available, click on a building explore the 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, or 4<sup>th</sup> floor and see the layout and footprint, see what is needed for permits, calculate the cost of rehab, and find out all the incentives that are in place in that area, tax credits, RLF, UFRLF etc. When the CEO finally picks up the phone and calls the city, he/she will have enough information to ask the right questions and get the right answers. We will also have an Advisory Board made up of experts in multiple industries from Washington County who will know where there industry is headed, who is expanding, and who is trying to relocate. One member of the Board will be a financial expert who will be able to point us in the direction of the companies who are looking to expand, who are doing well in their industry and who may need to relocate because of a changing market. This is a very exciting time, even in these tough economic times some industries are doing well.**

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

**Unfortunately, with the national downturn in the economy I believe it is difficult for any business to do more than just hold on right now. Having said that, I would ask that when the marketing initiative becomes reality the businesses maintain a web site so that we can link them to ours and vice versa. Having the ability to utilize the city’s marketing tools will benefit each other. Again, the ability to bombard new businesses with information overload in search of expansion or relocation is paramount to set us apart from competing cities. The ability to put together a coalition to lobby Annapolis, as the Chamber has done in recent years, is also a tool that has proven worthwhile. Positive publicity of events, new initiatives and projects that the City provides is also a tool that can encourage other businesses to locate here.**

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?

**Although the foreclosure rate in the city proper is high, some are a result of investors buying and looking for a quick capital gain while the market was up. Now since the economy has declined, home sales are down and many who invested in property to re-sell have not been able to afford their mortgages. The most positive impact the City can have to help remedy this problem is retaining employers and creating new jobs. I will aggressively seek grant**

**money through the State and Federal Governments to help spur retention and expansion of business. I will utilize our lobbying group in DC to receive stimulus money to help defray the cost of doing business in Hagerstown.**

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”?

**Paid firefighters, quicker response time for police, trash collection, lower water and sewer rates, permits, inspections, street department. All of these are quantifiable benefits to living within the city limits.**

Do residents get their money’s worth?      **YES.**

**Pen-Mar Regional Association of REALTORS® Candidates Questionnaire  
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**Candidate Name:** Jonathan Ryan Burrs

**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.

**I absolutely do not believe funding to the city is being spent in the most effective manner that best serves the citizens of Hagerstown! \$55,000 for a fountain, \$58,000 for the marketing of the downtown and the resistance and opposition to changing the municipal elections to coincide with either the state or national elections with minimal estimated savings of \$60,000 in my opinion are examples of fiscal irresponsibility. Additionally, the money spent on the graphic on S Potomac, which seems to already be in need of a touch up, is yet another example of these administrations questionable priorities for using city funds.**

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

**Solutions for seniors and additional support for Holly Place and other assisted living facilities, tax incentives for existing and new businesses to support the challenges currently faced during the current state of economic crisis, help for organizations like meals on wheels, the United Way and the Community Action Agency, are a few things that quickly come to mind that I would support using these resource for. Additionally, Washington County has the third-highest overall teen birth rate in Maryland largely impacted by teen pregnancies in Hagerstown, more specifically Hagerstown's West End and according to recent data the high teen birth rate is above the state and national averages.**

**According to analysis from the National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, teen childbearing in Maryland cost taxpayers at least \$195 million in 2004. Additional statistics show that in Maryland the teen birth rate declined 40 percent between 1991 and 2004 saving taxpayers and estimated \$174 million in 2004 alone. That said, in my opinion more funding should be made available for teen pregnancy prevention workshops and education which in the long-term has proven to significantly reduce cost to taxpayers.**

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

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?

**I would support a task force because a lot of the PMC problems are due to absentee owners and code violations being forced for some and not for others. The task force could oversee all of the city property owners and hold each and every owner accountable for violations.**

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

**The city could improve what it's doing by offering tax incentives to support private investment. Additionally, the ongoing challenges that developers like Don Bowman experience with renovation plans and other downtown revitalization projects create just the environment private investors avoid! In my opinion, this is something that must change.**

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

**On- going communication with the director of Community affairs and business owners to increase Event venues, and with the new Convention center, hopefully this will bring large conferences and events to the city.**

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 support and work with Pen-Mar and NAR realtors to continue encouraging congress to pass legislature to get lending institutes to lend to qualifying buyers and those that wish to refinance. Support the housing portion of the stimulus bill for those that were affected by predatory lenders and dishonest practices of builders, and the tax breaks proposed for homeowners, as well as the restructuring of these loans.**

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

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”?

**At present, I do not believe residents “get their money’s worth” living within the city as compared with owners outside the municipal boundaries, so accordingly there really isn’t much of a legitimate argument to present to future homeowners as to why they should choose to live within the City.**

**However, if elected as Mayor, this can and will change under my administration. I will pursue an aggressive downtown revitalization schedule using a combination of strategies to attract investors, developers, and small business owners to the city. The cost of purchasing real estate whether commercial or residential is still relatively low as compared to other areas in the state of Maryland as well as other parts of the country. This along with tax incentives for renovating properties for city revitalization, is one of several strategies I would use to encourage private investment in the city, build a sustainable local economy, and provide exactly the type of services and living environment that could be used to entice future homeowners to choose to live within the City.**