



## **Montgomery County Commissioner Candidate Interview Leslie Richards and Josh Shapiro**

### 1) Why are you running as a candidate for the Board of Commissioners?

Richards: I believe that we need commissioners who keep their eye on the bottom line while improving the quality of life. There are so many issues that need a regional approach, and I feel that we can bring that dynamic to the county.

Shapiro: I have seven years in the state house. I love what I do, but I got into this business because I have a sincere desire to help people. I love the opportunity to assist people. I see that the county government has to do more with less. I see this as an opportunity to represent 800,000 people. I am excited about the prospects. I think that we will make a great team. So much is done through the county level.

### 2) What are the most pressing issues facing the county and what are your plans to address them?

Shapiro: We have to hold the line on taxes. We cannot burden Montgomery County with any additional tax burdens. We need to improve the quality of life. We have to get our fiscal house in order. We need to streamline government. We need to leverage staff to make sure that everybody's dollar goes further.

I do not share the assumption that our economy is not going to grow. We can utilize technology and people in a more efficient way. I have offered a way to save 10% at the state house, and we still function at the same level.

Richards: My experience in the private sector—I am in charge of managing budgets. These are the types of skills we need at the county level. We cannot let things go past deadline. We made investments to make sure that things are done more efficiently in Whitemarsh. We do not want people just feeding information into databases. When we invest, we need to make sure that we are doing it in such a way that brings value back. In Whitemarsh, we tackled a major stormwater initiative. That brought property values back. Those are the types of things that we will be looking at. I think this county needs us to invest in infrastructure. This is something that we will be working on...particularly our roads and bridges need to be well maintained.

### 3) Montgomery County's Chief Financial Officer recently warned that if the county's cash balance sinks any lower, there will be a definite downgrade in the current AAA bond rating. How do you plan on maintaining the county's excellent bond rating in this challenging economic environment?



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Richards: It is very important. It speaks to the strength of the county. That bond rating will need to be maintained. It is important for the business community is confident in what we are doing. We need to maintain our fiscal health in the county.

Shapiro: We need 5-10 million more in our reserves in order to maintain our rating. We will do that. It is critical. The key though is that making sure that our bond rating benefits are spread to all of the people in the county. We need to make sure our government is more responsive to everybody. We need to take it a step further. The greatness of our county is not just through maintaining our bond rating, but leveraging that.

- 4) Do you believe property tax assessment reform is needed in Pennsylvania? If so, would you support property tax reform that provides greater uniformity and equity through a system of more regular county-wide tax assessments?

Shapiro: At the county—we do not support reassessment. We have an appeals process. From afar that appeals process seems to be okay. We want to make sure that we have the right people on that appeals board. That process is an effective process. We will not raise county assessment while we are in office.

Richards: No county reassessment.

- 5) What is your position on school districts appealing the assessed value of recently purchased residential real estate in Montgomery County?
- 6) REALTORS® are very knowledgeable about their communities and the housing market. As a County Commissioner, how would you utilize this expertise? Would you consider appointing individuals recommended by our organization to real estate related boards and commissions at the county level?

Richards: Absolutely, I feel that we need more marketing for our communities. Realtors are the perfect place where that can start. We need to make sure that people know what a great place Montgomery County is. We want to make sure that people know that communities have great things to offer. We need to provide those services. We would want to work closely with you. Quality of life issues—that's why we are running.

Shapiro: I would reach out to local Realtors in my community. I would want to know what was happening on the street. We'll make that a much more formal approach at the county level. We talk about streamlining government. We want a job and economic czar. This could



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be someone who already exists in government. We would have that individual that would sell our county to others. We want this individual to answer to the commissioners. We are going to demonstrate to people that we want them to live and work in the county. We would look to you for advisory capacities. We want them to work and we want to hear from them. We are going to by relying on you to grow our way out of this national recession.

### 7) Endorsements.

Shapiro: We are running a different kind of campaign this time. We are reaching across county lines. We are proud of the fact that we have republicans supporting us. We will have 7 campaign offices. The messages that we have is of fiscal responsibility. One of the reasons you are seeing political support coming to us is that people are tired to the bickering. I think even when the people of Montgomery County don't realize they are using county government—they are. We recognize the vast reach of county government. The groups that have endorsed us—our vast number of volunteers understand this. We are appealing to everybody.

Richards: PA Women's Campaign Forum (bipartisan)

### 8) Why should a REALTOR® vote for you?

Richards: We are the only team that has an in depth knowledge of planning zoning and issues that are important to realtors. In Whitmarsh, we have three projects that will improve upon our community. I worked on a Riverfront project which will increase that area as a public amenity and accessibly. That will be a valuable resource for residents. I also worked on a village commercial ordinance. It considers residential and commercial and creates intelligent connections between the two. Riverfront will be up for a public hearing this week. Multi-municipal planning we need to do more of that. Pro business. We want to make sure that things are done in an intelligent way

Shapiro: We are the team with better more substantive plans. I have been a solid vote for the realtors. I believe in allowing communities to flourish and thrive. We want to improve the housing market. We want to improve the business climate. You should vote for us not only for our history, but because of the ideas and plans we have which jive with your ideals and those of your clients. We would like to improve upon our long list of supports.