INFORMATION FOR VOTERS REGARDING TUESDAY NOVEMBER 5 ELECTION IN TOWN OF BEL AIR

The candidates for the Bel Air Board of Town Commissioners are listed below in alphabetical order. Harford County Climate Action (HCCA) is an all-volunteer, non-profit organization dedicated to addressing the climate crisis through local action. We can't endorse any candidates, but we can encourage you to vote and help to get you information about the candidates! The election will be held on Tuesday, November 5, from 7:00 a.m. - 8:00 p.m. at Bel Air Town Hall, 39 N. Hickory Avenue, Bel Air, MD. There are three pending vacancies on the Board. Turn out is typically low. Our government is a representative democracy only if we participate, so please vote!

We are sharing background information about each candidate and why they are running for office. This information was copied from the Aegis. We also asked each candidate if they would answer two questions:

1. Do you feel that the town of Bel Air has a responsibility to reduce its carbon emissions in order to help to slow climate disruption? If “yes”, what steps do you think should be taken?

2. The city of Havre de Grace, i.e. all government divisions such as City Hall, Police, Water Treatment, etc., sources 100% of its electricity from solar energy that is produced in Maryland. The city has saved money by doing this. Would you support sourcing 100% of Bel Air government’s energy needs from clean sources, also? (Clean sources=solar, wind, and geothermal)

Kevin Bianca, Phil Einhorn, Erin Hughes, and Donna Kahoe answered these questions and others at recent HCCA meetings. The rest of the candidates did not respond to our invitation to speak to constituents.

Kevin Bianca, Phil Einhorn, Erin Hughes, Donna Kahoe, Jim McMahan, and Michael Kutcher responded to our questions by email.

Daniel Gray, Bill Kelly, and Jim Lockard did not respond to us in any way.

The League of Women Voters of Harford County will be hosting a Voter Forum on Wednesday, October 30, 2019, from 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m., at Bel Air Town Hall. You can learn more about the candidates at this forum.

Kevin Bianca

Bianca, who has served on the Town of Bel Air’s Traffic Safety Task Force and as a member of the town police department’s Citizens Advisory Board, says Bel Air “is ready for the next generation of leadership, and we need a forward thinker who is ready to work for the future of our Town.”

Currently the director of the Circuit Court of Harford County’s Community Work Service Program and previously the community services coordinator for the county’s detention center, Bianca said he’s spent his whole career in public service. Bianca, who has lived in the Town of Bel Air for four years, said he’s running for commissioner with an eye on the future.

“As the father of a young child, it’s important to me that we think about how decisions made today can be made not only in the interests of the here and now, but for the interest of the future generations of
Bel Air,” he said. “These elections matter, and the citizens of the Town deserve a Commissioner who will work hard every day to make sure Bel Air’s future is as great as its past.”

1. I feel that every municipality in every state has a responsibility to reduce its carbon footprint, and the Town of Bel Air is no exception. In order to fight against climate change, we do not need 1 or 2 large cities to be perfectly carbon-neutral, we need thousands of smaller jurisdictions working towards reducing their carbon footprint. The topic of climate change can be overwhelming to think about; but we can help lead the fight to a more sustainable future. It’s not only about raising awareness; it’s about changing the culture of our Town. There are ways that even a small municipality such as the Town of Bel Air can reduce its carbon footprint, and here are my ideas for fighting climate change at our local level:
   a. **Create a Sustainability Committee** - There is currently a Tree Committee in Bel Air which is responsible for monitoring and developing the urban tree canopy (currently at about 36%). I propose to create a larger, more intensive Sustainability Committee that would work collaboratively with citizens and businesses to reduce their carbon footprint. This would entail planting new trees in suitable locations, working with residents and businesses to conserve energy and water, increase (proper) recycling, and encouraging more people to walk/bike to Town in lieu of driving. Once established, I would also like to see the committee work with local businesses to promote my next idea...
   b. **Create incentives for Town businesses to join the MD Green Registry** - Only 2 Town businesses are currently on the registry, we can and should do better in helping our businesses succeed in being green. We need to work collaboratively with businesses to find a way to promote sustainable practices to reduce our carbon footprint. Long term, I would like to work to get local businesses to use green products (no plastic straws or utensils, Styrofoam, etc.) and move towards doing away with plastic bags. Town policy should be to work with the Downtown Alliance help these businesses and promote the ones who use sustainable practices, and hopefully if businesses see that they have the backing of the government and positive marketing on their behalf more will be accomplished. Which leads me to my next idea...
   c. **Create a Sustainable Business of the Year!** - This should be a wonderful way to encourage businesses to do more for our planet. We can have businesses enter the competition and the winner would be eligible for not only a prize, but heavy promoting from the Downtown Alliance and Town of Bel Air Economic Development. Businesses could be judged on a number of factors: local purchasing, energy usage, sustainability and waste management, water conservation, etc. The possibilities are endless, but the goal is to not only raise awareness of how we can be more sustainable but to embed that in our collective Town ethos. We need to get in the habit of thinking green, and it is going to take a culture shift in this Town to get there.

2. I would 100% support the Town of Bel Air getting its energy from renewable sources, just like Havre de Grace currently does. I would also encourage any new buildings being proposed be built to LEED certification (new Town Hall/Police Station) so that the citizens can know that the Town takes sustainability seriously and be a model for the region. I would add that I would like to see the Town of Bel Air be a stronger advocate for sustainable practices county-wide, such as arguing on behalf of the proposed solar farm on Rt 136 that has been fighting for years in order to get
approval to break ground. The county decision to deny the solar farm based on zoning was recently vacated on appeal by the Circuit Court for Harford County, and the final approval now rests with the Public Service Commission. A large scale solar farm such as this would provide power for around 50,000 homes, and it is my opinion that more public officials need to be advocating on behalf of projects such as this that can put us on a path towards a sustainable future.

**Philip Einhorn**

Einhorn is seeking re-election to the board of commissioners “because I love this town and have the many hours necessary to do the job properly ... I want to help Bel Air remain one of the best towns in our country.”

A U.S. Navy veteran and a retired sales rep for an insurance company, Einhorn first moved to Bel Air in 1962, later leaving because of his job, before returning in 2005. He ran for commissioner four years ago because he wanted to work with his friend, Town Administrator Jesse Bane, he said.

“Shortly after my election I heard that we had some older police cars for a local auction. I attended and was shocked to see these vehicles go for as little as $2,000,” he said. Later at a Maryland Municipal League event in Ocean City, Einhorn said he met a man who had a website auctioning government vehicles. He took the idea to Bane and Bel Air joined the website to sell its vehicles and other property. “This has saved our town many thousands of dollars already,” he said.

1. Carbon emissions - I suggest that you have your group attend one of our town hall meetings and share your ideas with the commissioners. We would be glad to hear them. I think we should do everything possible to make our town safer for the future considering our ability to cover the costs.

2. We partnered with Johnson Controls to cut our electrical costs and it is working well. We had our lights changed and we had our Town Office equipped with solar panels. We take their suggestions to cut our costs. I would be willing to see what they could do for our armory. We are a small town and have to watch our costs.

**Daniel Gray**

Gray is a lifelong resident of the Town of Bel Air who said he has no previous political experience, but has considered running for many years. For the past 25 years, Gray said he has worked for various medical device companies with the focus being on improving patient’s quality of life through advanced medical therapy and technology.

A father of four, Gray said he has also been actively involved in the community over the last 15 years through Harford County recreation programs and Harford County School System. He was also an active member of the the Bel Air Volunteer Fire Company for nine years.
“My platform is based on the 3 Ls,” Gray said. “Listening to you, Learning from you, and Leading with your support. Community involvement is crucial to the success of the Town of Bel Air and I look forward to hearing from all of you!”

Erin Hughes

Hughes said she is trying to use her campaign to help people better understand how Bel Air’s town government works, in hopes that “if people better understand how their local government functions and realize they, as residents, have opportunities to get involved, that they will do so and become more active members of their community.”

A computer engineer/software developer for a contractor at Aberdeen Proving Ground following a career as a registered nurse, Hughes said she has lived in the greater Bel Air area for more than 35 years, and within town limits for about two and a half years.

During the past two years, she’s been an active volunteer for the Bel Air Downtown Alliance and said “I love the way Bel Air’s downtown area and the surrounding neighborhoods have developed into such a fun and vibrant place to live and work.”

“My goal as a candidate for Bel Air Town Commissioner is to work with town residents and local business owners to ensure a bright and healthy future for our beautiful town,” she said. “I also hope to continue to improve pedestrian/bike safety within the town and encourage environmental sustainability.”

1. I do believe the Town of Bel Air has a responsibility to reduce its carbon footprint. Several important steps to achieve this goal have already been proposed in Bel Air’s Sustainability Plan such as reducing energy usage through LED lighting, incentivizing the building of and conversion to more energy-efficient businesses (LEED certification), protecting and expanding the green spaces and tree canopy in the town, encouraging and protecting pedestrian/bicycle traffic in town, etc. I would encourage the town to follow through on making the changes proposed in this plan.

2. I love that Havre de Grace has opted to get all of its energy from renewable sources. I would absolutely encourage the commission to reach out to Havre de Grave town officials to discuss how they made the transition and use the cost-savings as a reason to move forward sooner rather than later.

Donna Kahoe

Recently retired after a 23-year career as a legal analyst with T. Rowe Price, Kahoe said she’s running for town commissioner because she wants “to see the Bel Air community continue to grow in a a positive way.”

Kahoe, a lifelong resident of Harford County and 20-year resident of the Bel Air, is a former member of the county’s Democratic Central Committee, and has been involved with several groups including the Harford County Women’s Giving Circle, Greater Bel Air Community Foundation, Habitat for Humanity and a former board member of the Liriodendron Foundation.
If elected, Kahoe said she wants to specifically focus on improving pedestrian safety “by expanding the walkability and safety of downtown for residents and visitors of all ages.” She also wants to work on “marketing our Main Street District to maximize our town venues, specifically the Armory, Rockfield, etc. which are fabulous resources for events and promoting local merchants.”

1 and 2) I wholeheartedly respond Yes! to both questions 1 and 2 on the attached letter.

I believe it is imperative to continually strive to improve environmental performance both as individuals, as well as the town as a whole. I am interested in all methods available to cutting carbon dioxide emissions.

As for solar energy, I am happy with the initial steps that the Town has taken to implement its own solar energy production, i.e. the solar panels on the Town Hall building and look forward to pursuing other initiatives. Options for outsourcing solar energy and the cost feasibility are of great interest to me.

That said, I have not yet seen studies that the town has done with regard to either of these and look forward to reviewing them. Additionally, as a novice to local municipal environmental issues I would greatly appreciate the HCCA’s insight and suggestions on both of these issues.

Bill Kelly

Kelly said he’s running for town commissioner to “be a strong voice supporting our town including its residents and business partners.” A 15-year resident of Bel Air, Kelly is a certified public accountant and certified financial planner who, along with his partner and nephew, Bryan Kelly, co-founded The Kelly Group, located on Gordon Street in downtown.

As a member of the Bel Air Economic and Community Development Commission, the Bel Air Traffic Safety Task Force and treasurer for the Greater Bel Air Community Foundation, which has supported capital improvement projects in the community, Kelly said he’s stayed current with the town’s “forward progress as an active participant,” and, if elected, would “work hard to give back to our community.”

“I bring a strong fiscal and financial perspective from my years in finance and business,” Kelly said. “I am pleased with our town’s growth and direction and I want to participate in the development of the positive future growth of our town. I believe I can be an effective member of the Bel Air town commissioners.”

Michael Kutcher

Kutcher, a 30-year resident of the town, said he’s seen a lot of change in that time, “some for the better, some for the worse, and some just change.” He’s running for town commissioner to address “critical issues” facing the town, such as “increased crime, paralyzing traffic, vacant buildings and over development.”

“I chose Bel Air 30 years ago for its small town charm and appeal to raise my family,” said Kutcher, a software engineer at Digital Innovation, Inc., where he has worked for 27 years. “Now that the kids have grown and are out on their own, I am once again being drawn to serve,” he said, referencing a stint in the
Maryland Army National Guard before he was medically discharged. “I would like to help preserve Bel Air for generations to come.”

1) Yes. Each and every one of us has a responsibility to reduce our impact on the environment – carbon footprint or otherwise.

Renewable/free/clean energy should be used whenever and wherever possible. New construction and new town vehicle purchases should use clean energy sources when feasible.

2) This is not a simple yes/no answer. I would support the use of clean energy sources so long as the environmental impact of such sources is minimal. I do not want to see wind farms or giant solar arrays on every beach or every single scenic country hillside.

James Lockard

Lockard, who has been a lifelong resident of Bel Air and recently retired from the town’s police force after a 26-year career, said he’s running for commissioner to “continue my service to this town, its employees, residents and visitors.” His years working for the town give him experience navigating the landscape and politics of Bel Air, he said, and “grant me a unique skillset and knowledge from others.”

“It is important that those who hold elected positions in this Town realize that we must acknowledge and reward the hard work and dedication our employees, volunteers and those we serve,” Lockard, who now works in enterprise security for M&T Bank and teaches classes in police administration and forensic photography at the University of Baltimore.

“I believe in looking at all possibilities to seek funding, staff and other resources,” he said. “If our people are our most important resource than we must attract and retain only the most qualified and dedicated of the applicants.”

James “Capt'n Jim” McMahan

McMahan is no stranger to Harford County or Bel Air politics, having previously served as a town commissioner from 2002 to 2006, then as a member of the Harford County Council. “Historical knowledge is extremely important to any town government and I am the only candidate who brings that knowledge to the table,” he said. McMahon has been a part of numerous organizations over the years, including the Bel Air Chamber of Commerce, co-founder of the Fourth of July Committee and of the Bel Air Community Band, and most recently reorganized the county’s commissioner on veterans affairs at the request of the county executive.

The lifelong resident, former police officer and veteran, said, if elected, he wants to follow through on positive program initiated by current Bel Air Mayor Susan Burdette. “There’s an old saying, ‘if it ain’t broke, don’t fix it.’ Bel Air is not broke and I want to make sure it stays in good shape,” McMahan said.

Town residents “deserve tranquil neighborhoods with traffic calming devices. They must be able to walk safely to our parks, schools and community events,” he said. “We need to fix the deteriorating police offices now. We must support our business community by buying local.”
1) The answer is certainly YES, but I am not an engineer with expertise in the subject. As an elected official I try to be an advocate of what is right for the residents, the business community and that also includes our planet. I can strongly advocate to be shown “Best Practices” by our staff and encourage open dialogue thus keeping up with trends in the cleaner environment arenas. The town has initiated steps with solar on town hall and “led” lighting and they are midway into a 5 year contract with Johnson Controls in assessing environmental issues. Approval has been given for solar fields in town and homeowners can also install solar panels on their roofs. That is all positive on the part of the town.

Please allow me to go one step further. There is so much data out there on this subject John Q Public does not know who is putting up real scientific information and who is not. HOWEVER it does not take a rocket scientist to understand something has been changing with our weather, our crops, our wildlife, even our trees. This is where my historical prospective comes into play. When was the last time you skated on Bynum Pond? When was the last time so was so deep, hay had to be air dropped to cattle or bulldozed to the field? In the 1940's and 50's, freezes and steady snowfalls were common place. I remember when business owners came into town by pony and sleigh just to open up shop. We have had one snowfall of the type I refer to in the last 15 years. I have attached pictures that help make my point. The picture of the three young men are on ice skates and they are skating on the street. It was cold and it stayed cold!!! Whether you believe the Pro side or the Con side of Global Warming something is happening and my philosophy is not to be a citizen that exacerbates the problem.

I am not a scientist but I can absorb information and make decisions based upon facts.

2) There is no way to give this an intellectual answer until the new board is made aware of the different circumstances between the needs of Havre de Grace and the needs of Bel Air.