

Capital Gazette



Kurt Riegel is the Democratic candidate for alderman in Ward 2. (By Matthew Cole / Baltimore Sun Media Group)

By **Kurt Riegel**

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Annapolis is a great town. It's compact and full of great people, activities, history and beauty. And we have a delightfully quirky sense of humor.

Where else can you find an annual declaration of war between neighborhoods? An across-the-creek tug of war? A 0.05K race? A mayor who missed a deadline and had to walk a pirate ship's plank? A kerfuffle over backyard hens that morphed into an art project that installed decorated chickens all over town?

Good city government is serious business for serious people, but we need a bit of fun as we make it happen. I honor our people, our traditions, our accomplishments, also recognizing that we can make our city better. That's why I'm running.

My top priority is responsiveness through better communication with constituents.

Residents tell me they hate learning that something important has already been decided without their input. I'll provide alerts on upcoming issues, share initial positions and seek input from residents so that my final vote truly represents our best interests. I pledge to reach out with regular communication and to hold town halls so that residents learn about emerging issues and can help influence outcomes.

We are one Annapolis. I'll always defend fairness for all our residents. Public safety depends upon truly effective community policing and our Nondiscrimination Ordinance, and on working together to foster trust among residents and government.

We Annapolitans care deeply about our environment, but our creeks are dirty, unsafe and have lost most of their life. Science tells us that we can improve this locally using the tools we already have. We don't have to wait for overall improvement in the Chesapeake Bay.

As a leader in civic organizations and on public commissions I'm proud of our environmental accomplishments but we still have a long way to go. Ward 2's treasured Weems and College creeks suffer from decades of tree removal and poor stormwater control. My professional experience and personal dedication can help, as they already have in leadership positions on four local watershed commissions and organizations.

I'll work for a diverse transportation system that is resilient against the traffic disruptions we've seen too often. I'll push for better public transportation in partnership with the county and major employers. The free West Street Circulator encourages people to park in outer West Street lots and mainly benefits Ward 1 businesses. Let's find a better way of connecting both Ward 1 and Ward 2's business districts so everybody wins.

Safety fears keep people from thinking of bicycles as a valid mode of transportation. We can relieve some car traffic, improving safety. Let's remove telephone poles from the middle of sidewalks, repair sidewalks and add safe bike routes to our transportation infrastructure. I will help to extend the Poplar Trail all the way from downtown Annapolis to Annapolis Towne Center in Parole.

I'll work tirelessly to make sure your tax dollars are spent wisely. Employee pension and health costs are unsustainable, and lately the city has been financing short-term costs with long-term borrowing. More debt may be necessary in times of recession, but in this era of prosperity it makes no sense and jeopardizes our financial future.

Our property tax rate is already 30 percent higher than Anne Arundel County's, so more city taxes make no sense. Instead, I'll work for equitable sharing of the burdens placed on us by state and county governments and tax-exempt organizations.

Are we overpaying county taxes? Are fees and payments to the city in lieu of taxes fairly set? The State Commission on the Capital City was created to consider just these kinds of multi-jurisdictional issues, but it hasn't met for a decade. That's inexcusable. I'll push hard to get it going again.

I'm running to give Ward 2 residents a stronger voice and to make our town better. If you share my vision for our future, please join me. Let's improve civic vitality, mobility and responsibility for a great Annapolis where people love to live and which outsiders want to visit.

Kurt Riegel is the Democratic candidate for alderman in Ward 2. Contact him at KurtRiegel@gmail.com.