

At end of first council term, Ervin readies for four more years

District 5 councilwoman set to become council president, continue focus on budget, schools

by Jason Tomassini | Staff Writer

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When Councilwoman Valerie Ervin began her first council term four years ago, she had a "road map" for what she wanted to accomplish for Montgomery County. It included better pre-kindergarten education, more multi-modal transportation options and the continued redevelopment of downtown Silver Spring.

She's made steps toward all of those goals and more. But it's been a tougher path than she expected.

"These are long days every day," Ervin, (D-Dist. 5) of Silver Spring, said by phone Friday. "... It's almost like working becomes part of who you are, your life. There's no separation between public and private life."

Her re election campaign, which she filed for earlier this month, should be less strenuous. She currently faces no challengers to represent a district that includes parts of Silver Spring, Wheaton and Kensington.

Her next term will begin much like the first ended: focusing on the county's budget. Last year she preserved funding for several Silver Spring projects on the chopping block—like the Old Blair Auditorium and Metropolitan Branch Trail—but squabbled with school officials over additional cuts to Montgomery County Public Schools and furloughs for MCPS staff.

Ervin, who served on the board from 2004 to 2006 and is chair of the council's education committee, said, as a policymaker, she had to back schools cuts in a tough budget year. But that didn't erase her goodwill with MCPS.

"All of the tensions are behind us," said Board of Education President Patricia O'Neill, who served on the board with Ervin. Since she left the board, Ervin has still been a major ally to it, O'Neill said.

Ervin has lobbied for federal funds to initiate a free summer lunch program for low-income students, which will kick off its third year Monday in 14 county schools. She also helped launch the county's first truancy court program and the Kennedy Cluster project, which takes an intergovernmental approach to closing the achievement gap.

"Those don't just serve my district," Ervin said. "They serve the entire community."

Despite those successes, her June 14 fundraiser was met with picketing from the county's police union. Like they have for two other council members, the Fraternal Order of Police Lodge 35 picketed Ervin because she voted for furlough days for county employees, said Jane Milne, a police union spokeswoman.

Ervin brushed off the picketing, calling the issue "way overplayed" during a time when all county agencies are seeing historic cuts.

Those hiccups won't deter her from focusing on her blueprint for the next four years, Ervin said. She is coy when discussing her future beyond that.

"I'm coming back for four more years, and I will be the best council member I can be," Ervin said. "But 2014 is going to be a very interesting year for Democratic politics. ... My options are open."

Party: Democrat

Education: Bachelor's degree from National Labor College; master's degree in Public Administration, University of Baltimore

Work experience: Chief of Staff, Montgomery County Councilman George Leventhal; Dean, National Labor College.

Family: Two sons: Solomon, 28, and Jonathan, 23; and two grandchildren.

Top three issues: Maintaining our world-class school system. Preserving and protecting green space and parks. Economic development.

Website: www.Valerieervin.org