

Marc Elrich

Narrator: You're listening to *BioTalk* with Rich Bendis, the only podcast focused on the BioHealth Capital Region. Each episode, we'll talk to leaders in the industry to break down the biggest topics happening today in BioHealth.

Rich Bendis: Hi, this is Rich Bendis. I'm your host for *BioTalk*. As you know, we talk to leaders from the BioHealth Capital Region—Maryland, D.C. and Virginia—and find out what's going on relative to the BioHealth industry. We couldn't think of a more appropriate guest today than having the county executive of Montgomery County, which has become the epicenter for COVID-19 and pandemic research, and talk a little bit about what's going on within this county. And that's County Executive Marc Elrich. County Executive Elrich, welcome to *BioTalk*.

Marc Elrich: Yeah, good to see you.

Rich Bendis: Good to see you. And even though most people know you, we have listeners from all over the United States and some from around the world that don't know as much about Montgomery County.

0:01:00 So why don't we let you introduce yourself to the listeners? A little bit about your background and how you actually got to where you are today.

Marc Elrich: I was born in D.C. in 1949. That gets me at 70 years old, going on 71. Lived in the District until I was ten, moved to Montgomery County in the winter of I guess '59 and '60. Went to public schools here. I went to University of Maryland. Got active almost immediately 'cause it was 1967. I was involved in the antiwar movement. I was involved in the civil rights effort. One of the big things we worked at the University of Maryland was to integrate the university, which was largely a segregated campus, and a largely segregated community. Problematic, and not a very welcoming place to minorities at the time. So that was my big involvement in politics, and it kind of was eye-opening, because I didn't like what I saw in the world. I was not a big fan of death and destruction.

0:02:00 I thought the denial of people of their basic rights, whether in the United States or anywhere, was not a really good thing. And it kind of set me on a path of wanting to see what I could do to make a difference. I spent time in the private sector. I was a manager in a very large corporation. I've operated small businesses. I was a founder of a food co-op in Silver

Spring, where I took a lot of what I had learned out of the private sector and brought it into a community-run, worker-managed store. I did that for probably eight years. Wound up getting a master's in teaching. I taught elementary school. I was looking for something to do to make a difference. So I wound up teaching elementary school. I did that for 17 years in Montgomery County at one of the higher-impacted schools in the county, and I felt like every day was purposeful and meaningful. But I always stayed engaged in political stuff. Got elected to the city council in Takoma Park in 1987.

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I spent 19 years on the city council until I got elected to the county council in 2006. So, when you ask, "Why politics?" Because I always looked at politics as the way you change things. I always would try to discourage my friends that believed they shouldn't get involved in politics because it was a dirty thing. There are aspects of it that are not good, but the reality is that this is the way change happens. And sometimes politics changes because people lead and the politicians have to do what people want. Sometimes political leadership provides the leadership, and people are happy to see what happens. But I was always engaged in, "How do you make the world a better place?"

Rich Bendis:

That's why politics. And basically different leaders have different ways to lead, and let's talk a little bit about how you view your leadership role as the county exec for really the economic engine for the state of Maryland and really for a very diverse county.

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Marc Elrich:

The first thing is I try to be inclusive. And I'm very much a listener to people. I did not surround myself with people who agreed with me. I did not fill my offices with friends. I was interested in different points of view and different skill sets. And I've told my staff from the day I got there that, "Feel free to disagree with me. There are no penalties for that." Because you know what you know, but that's based on your own experiences and learning. It doesn't mean you've learned everything or experienced everything. And so I've tried to bring an openness to what I do, and to give people some rein in the county to reimagine government. I talked about that a lot when I was running, is I want people to think about government differently. I've told my staff, I said, "Pretend that you're on the first day of your job at a new company. The company

knows its mission, but it's not sure how they would go about executing their mission. So think about how you'd set this place up and run this place if you were starting over."

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Because I guarantee you, nobody would construct Montgomery County the way it is right now if you set out and said, "This is what we're going to do." You would do it differently. And so I've tried to liberate people from the notion that, "I hired you to fill a job. Do the job the way the job is described." But to ask yourself, "Could you do this better? Could you bring this different?" And I've tried to bring in more folks who take that. So I'm looking to provide a direction in leadership where there's an ability to change and to focus on what it is we're trying to do, not "Am I doing the Montgomery County way?" I hate that phrase. [laugh] Because that's not always associated with good things. Like the longest approval processes in the universe. So we've begun changing things. And so we've worked on things I think are really important. Sidney Katz from the Council and I did a long listening tour of the business community. Montgomery County has heard for a long time, "You are the worst place to do business."

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So it dawned on me during the campaign is we hear this all the time; we actually never did anything about it. So we went out and actually invited people to come and talk to us and tell us why we're so bad. And then we began incorporating the changes, the things that people told us about that made sense, and began incorporating them. So we changed our procurement processes. All the contracts are up and transparent online. You can see what's happening with contracts. We changed our procurement. We gave a local preference to businesses. Because we realized the money that I spend in Montgomery County stays in Montgomery County. So there's a multiplier effect, and sometimes it gets lost when you only look at price. I could get something cheap from somebody else, or a little less expensive, but all the money leaves. And if I do it with local businesses, the employees pay taxes here, the businesses pay taxes here, so it's actually healthier for us to do that. We've made changes in our permitting services department because I got really tired of hearing what people said about us, and I also knew that it was true.

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So our new director met with me less than a month ago, and she's like, "Okay, we have 87 things we're going to do to change how we do

permitting in the county.” And some of it’s just basic stuff. It’s like running approvals in parallel rather than in serial. So you don’t go from one desk to another, but you figure out how many people can be working on this at the same time. That speeds things up. It’s connecting inspectors in the field back to the office. If they think something shouldn’t be passed, they can go to the engineer who approved it and say, “I failed this” or “Is this what you intended?” So we’re doing little things we think will make this better. We’ve begun to reimagine what we’re doing with Worksource Montgomery, which did not really meet the needs of our workforce in Montgomery County, particularly people on the lower end of skills. And what the Council and I both really wanted was to move toward a system not just finding jobs for people where they are, but bringing people up to a level of where the jobs are.

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So, you know, we hear these stories of all these jobs that go wanting in the region and then Montgomery County for lack of a trained workforce. But you can either continue to import people for those jobs and leave unemployable people behind, or you can start figuring out, how do you get the people who are here the skills they need to get into the workplace? We’re making progress on bus rapid transit. The irony is when I proposed bus rapid transit in the county, it’s almost 13 years ago now, and we’ve done virtually nothing. My goal is to get us ahead of Northern Virginia, and to be the place that has the kind of transit service that’s going to make people want to come here. We were not able to get out of our own way. Meanwhile, Virginia builds the Silver Line. They build bus rapid transit in almost every county. They raise taxes on the commercial sector, and the commercial sector is actually along for the ride, because they understand that if you make a place accessible and you invest in transit, which makes jobs easier to get to and easier for employers to attract talent, that you win in the end of the day.

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And so they took the approach that this was a business investment. We’re trying to bring that same kind of consciousness here. We mapped out 100 lane miles of bus rapid transit that connects Montgomery County, not just the Red Line, which was built to take people from the suburbs into the city. You actually begin to provide intercounty connectivity. So you can live in Wheaton and easily get to any job anywhere in the county. So those are the kind of things that I want to do, and those are the things I think make us—can make us the economic

engine. And I'll talk more about special things about White Flint in your next question, so people get an idea of where we really want to go.

Rich Bendis: Great. But having served on the Council for 12 years before you became county exec, you knew sometimes it takes a little longer to get things done than what you would like, right?

Marc Elrich: I never accepted that. [laugh]

Rich Bendis: I know. [laugh] But you've been the county exec two years now.

0:10:02 So if you had to look at the one thing that makes you most proud in the first two years of your administration, what do you look to right now?

Marc Elrich: I look at beginning of changing of the culture in the county government. One of our people, Michael Baskin, started these training classes—well, we got a couple done before the COVID—where he actually went in and worked with cohorts of county employees and had them identify problems in their departments, and came up with solutions. So people would work on this for a couple months, and then come back and propose solutions in their departments that both saved money and made their departments more efficient. We had a waiting list of people signed up to take these classes, which tells you how much your workforce wants to be engaged in making this a better place to work. And that to me is one of the best things, is beginning to harness the talent of the people who work for us and giving them the opportunity—I mean, you do the job every day; you're probably more likely to see how you could do it better than a manager is, frankly.

0:11:07 So that's the kind of force I'm looking forward to unleashing here.

Rich Bendis: Right. It sounds interesting and culture changes are also long-term and challenging. But you gotta start. If you don't try to change, it's never gonna happen. But one of the other things you probably didn't anticipate when you became county executive was there was going to be a major pandemic hit the county in your second year. So how has COVID-19 impacted the county, and really how has the county responded to it?

Marc Elrich: Well, COVID has really hit us hard. We were the first place hit around here. I always like to remind people, our cases came from people who were on a cruise on the Nile River. They weren't even here. And three

cases came out of that. And from three cases, we've had 22,000 cases. It's just made me hyper-aware of what this virus does. Even today, we're getting 83 cases yesterday.

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I think we had a hundred earlier in the week; this is in a day. Is that you can't see this thing. And people who are getting sick are getting sick probably because they have contact with people who aren't symptomatic. They don't know they're sick. You don't know they're sick. And that tells you there's a pretty decent reservoir of this disease out in the community. And it was apparent on day one, when we saw how this thing spread. We've been more protective than other parts of the state. We have better numbers than other parts of the state that have been less protective, except for the very, very rural areas where human contact occurs less often and in less crowded circumstances. We've managed not to go through the big spike. I remember being terrified in the beginning when they did hospital scenarios for us. There was the worst case, in which case there was no way we were going to have the hospital beds. There was the medium case, in which case we were not going to have the hospital beds.

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And there was the low scenario, which is kind of what we tracked. And it was only because, I think, of what we did, and frankly what the governor did initially, in terms of limiting people's activities, that really, really made a difference. It has had a horrible impact on businesses, though. Terrible impact on people—over 800 dead. So many people sick. It has always been a disaster for the business community. And probably if I'm angry about anything in the federal government, is that they put people like me and all elected leaders in this position, where you have to make a choice between increasing the casualty toll of human beings or increasing the casualty toll of businesses. They should have taken this on day one as you're in a war, and you've just been bombed. And when the bombing is finished, you rebuild the place. You do not force people to decide, "Am I going to deal with the injured people whose lives have been shattered, or am I going to rebuild the buildings?"

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We should have done both. We're still not there yet. I'm hopeful that November changes that. But I think about World War II and the Marshall Plan. We rebuilt Europe after they were devastated because we knew that was the right thing. We can't even bring ourselves to rebuild

ourselves. So we need leadership that understands that we shouldn't be choosing between people's lives and businesses. That's my soapbox there, but [laugh] I will say—

Rich Bendis: Yeah, I get it.

Marc Elrich: —the things we've done—we've put \$28 million into small businesses, arts organizations, and non-profits. We've gotten heavy into teleworking, something that the county allowed but rarely permitted. And now over 70% of our workforce is teleworking, not a small thing. We did a very unusual thing. I told my folks in the beginning, "I want you to buy enough PPE to get us through the next phase. I do not want to be buying PPE in the middle of an upsurge." And so we did. We have so much PPE that we opened a store.

0:15:00 We are selling PPE to small businesses in the county, nursing homes, daycare centers. We've even provided PPE to other counties' hospitals, because we had it and other people didn't, and I'm glad we had it. We sell it for no profit, and we're able to buy it for less than most small businesses would ever be able to get it from the internet. So we thought we could not only get it available to them, but we could get it available to them at better prices. That's one of the things I'm really proud about. We've also put out \$10 million in child care assistance, \$3 million to medical practices, \$25 million to rental assistance and climbing. We are facing a disaster here come January. More than 20,000 households could face eviction for non-payment of months and months of rent. And the same is true, frankly, for the private sector of small businesses. They're running out of forgiveness. The money that the government gave to keep businesses alive—this thing just stretched on. I mean, I remember thinking in the beginning, "Oh, June will be the down month and we'll open up in July."

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And people were talking about opening up July 1st. "Will we be open for 4th of July?" It's like August 4th. We're still not there. The aid was predicated on a short duration. This has not been a short duration. We've targeted money, about \$8 million, in the Latino and African American communities. We learned that traditional means of communication really aren't effective and you can't not be effective in the midst of a crisis like

this. And the good thing out of that is by dispersing some of our social services, we realized this is a model we can keep afterwards. We're closer to the community. So I think that's going to evolve. And then we've done these recovery groups, with the health sectors, biotech, community groups, entertainment, all the businesses sectors, to talk about, how do we help things get going? And then we've got an economic recovery group, two of them. One is the short term, and the other is, how do we get Montgomery County going again in the long term?

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That's what COVID's been, and that's what we've tried to do.

Rich Bendis:

Well, thank you. It's good that you've become more proactive, because everybody's been more reactive, and a number of things that you're doing now, as you say, can be instilled in the government long-term after this. Hopefully we don't go through this again, but we'll be much better prepared. So one of the positive things to talk about, if there is a positive around COVID, is how many companies and individuals within Montgomery County are directly involved in the fight against it. And it really leads itself to the strength of our life science and BioHealth industry that we have in our backyard. That's evidenced, and I think you recognize it, and something that's real-time, is last week, you had a Future of Life Sciences Montgomery County meeting with about 14 or 15 of the leading CEOs in the BioHealth industry.

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And I think that was extremely good for them to understand that the government wants to know what their needs are, but also for you to understand what they're doing. So talk a little bit about that meeting you had with all those leaders last week, really the impact that life sciences has on the county.

Marc Elrich:

I hate to be mercenary, and I'm not going to be; it is a big economic driver and it employs a lot of people. What I like about it is that we're engaged in the life sciences, not the death sciences. The talent here, to a person, is focused on how do we make this place better? When I talk to people who work in different companies—and I was doing a tour of companies before COVID hit also—I'm just blown away at the dedication and commitment of people to finding solutions for the things that make

our lives shorter, more miserable, less productive than they could be. So, just been really impressed by it. I'm impressed by the collaboration, the kind of culture that's grown up here.

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I mean, there's a certain pride in being thought of as DNA Alley and the number one center of viral research. We got \$5 billion from the Feds put in here specifically to deal with COVID, but many of these people—Jeff Galvin at AGT; he's got an HIV drug that's about to go through trials. One of the other companies, Novavax, had a flu vaccine that was ready to go. So there are people doing amazing work, and I'm glad they're here, and I want to make sure that we are the most welcoming and most supportive that we can possibly be. And the revenues are great, but the work is greater.

Rich Bendis:

There's no question about it. And when you talk about the BARDA money and the COVID money, four out of the top eight companies in the United States are located in Montgomery County that got funded. And we've done a little analysis; there's over \$6 billion that's coming to Maryland as you can see.

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Five billion in Montgomery County; that's over 80% is coming into one county in one state, and over 30% of the BARDA money nationally is coming into one county. So that's pretty dramatic, and it also speaks well about what the federal government thinks about the companies here that can actually help address this pandemic in a real-time way. Really.

Marc Elrich:

Yep! We've been trying to pitch people. I mean, I've talked to foreign companies about coming here, and I said, "You know, at the end of the day, if you've got a drug you want to prove, the FDA is here. And if you want to be able to talk with people who are deep in the field, I've got life sciences up in Shady Grove, you've got NIH, you've got Walter Reed. You're in a place you could not have more intellectual capital, if you dreamed of." The only thing we lack here is research university, which is one of the things we want to go after, is some kind of research facility to further support the bio industry. That, I think, would be an important feather in our cap, but also a real asset for everybody here.

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Rich Bendis: Yeah, I agree. And you can put that on your wish list with some more venture capital, too. So there may be two things. I think the small companies will say, “We need more capital.” And then also the larger companies who are looking for talent—the funny thing, though, about this, County Executive, is basically, if you look at the amount of postdocs that we have here in our region, through the university system of Maryland, through Johns Hopkins, and located at NIH and FDA, we have thousands of postdocs and educated people here who have sort of come through that graduate system. The more important thing that they want is connectivity to the companies so they can get the jobs. Because there isn’t that much connectivity. And they really want to stay in this region, stay in Montgomery County, but they just need to be connected to the companies that are employing people with their skills.

Marc Elrich: So we want to accelerate that.

Rich Bendis: Yes. That’s something that’s very important for the county. So with these 15 people you talked to last week, while we know that there’s a lot of positive things going on within the BioHealth industry, we know there’s some things we can work on to make it better, too.

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So what’s your takeaways from hearing from the leaders last week about things that you think that maybe the county can improve upon? And you talked a little bit about improving the permitting process and accelerating site planning and things like that, but there were some other things that may have come up that you might want to talk about.

Marc Elrich: That is a big thing, because time is money. And if [laugh] we burn people’s time—so, you know, I was really glad—we did three biotech projects really quickly, and two of the three people expressed real trepidation about going through Montgomery County one more time [laugh] and having to endure that. So we made sure they did not endure that. And I saw the nicest letters I’ve ever seen written about a permitting process [laugh] in Montgomery County. But I think that’s part of like a new culture. That’s a big deal. I think the other things—I think people understand the need for more—I call them collision spaces, the ability for people to interface with each other.

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It is one thing—you know, that’s one reason I’m trying to drive what we want to do at White Flint, is because we want to create an environment overall where it is really easy for people to mix with each other and interact with each other. And we think we can do that. I know that we need to figure out how we do—what we do to get more venture capital here. You mentioned it before. I mean, capital is critically important. I’ve always felt—and people in the industry will say, “We punch below our weight.” When you’re the number three or four biotech center in the country and people tell me, from the center, when they go other places, and somebody says, “Where are you from?” and you say, “Rockville” or “Shady Grove,” and there’s like a “Where’s that?” We have all the assets without necessarily the recognition or reputation as a place that we ought to have. And so one of the things we need to do is make sure that we are out there promoting what we have, what this place is.

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I think in general, they want us to be able to move as expeditiously—not just with permitting, but in the regulatory environment—that we can, in the county, regulations burn time, and we’ve got to figure out how we do this in a more sensible way. And I’ve got enough experience—I’m not an anti-regulation person, but I’ve seen enough to know that not everything we regulate, we should regulate, or not every way we do it is an appropriate way to do it. Which goes back to rethinking how you go about doing your work and what are you trying to accomplish. I think more work with connecting with people—I mean, it was really good to hear what people wanted, what the needs were. I mean, clearly there’s a need for lab space in the county. That’s something the county could help facilitate. We just got approached by a company who wants to work with us on creating a bio incubator in the county.

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We used to have a bio incubator. We abandoned the [laugh] bio incubator, one of them. Now, we want to try to bring this back, and bring it back right. So that’s a big thing to me. My own personal thing, after listening—talking to that conversation and others—is trying to build more of an artificial intelligence computing presence in the county. We are leaders in this in some ways, but this is a new field, and the connection of what somebody referred to me as a grey lab, which turned

out to be their computer, and wet lab is [laugh] what they do inside a wet lab. Those two things are increasingly intersecting. I've talked to people—I knew a little bit about radio crystallography, but there have apparently been major advances in terms of how fast you can get images of a molecule. And if you're trying to figure out whether one molecule will be the key that fits the lock on the thing you're trying to attack, not having to sequence a gazillion different things and take weeks to get the images right when you start to build a library of rapidly produced images—it begins to open up the possibilities of speeding up research.

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So I think we're going to be the best partner we can possibly be. We will support efforts to bring in investment here. We're going to clean up our own act to make sure we're not in our way. And if there are things that we can contribute in terms of facilities and planning, we're going to do that. And this this ultimately what I want to do in White Flint, which is make that the center of AI and science in the county.

Rich Bendis:

You keep mentioning White Flint, and I'm going to let you talk about that now. Because basically you also have said Montgomery County has grown its life science industry and BioHealth industry by being a suburban industry, and if you look at some of the strong places in America, they have a little bit more of an urban culture. I think you personally believe that we're missing a little bit of that urban BioHealth ecosystem, which is one missing component, even though we're very strong.

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So what's your vision for an urban center and White Flint?

Marc Elrich:

I've had conversations with a number of people, really even before I got elected, about why companies don't come to Montgomery County, why one particular company had not come to Montgomery County and has since come here. And one of things people constantly said—"There's no *there* there." You've got restaurants, hospitality industry in Bethesda, but that doesn't necessarily spin off local businesses. They open hotels all around the world. You're only gonna open so many in Montgomery County. We weren't known for a kind of place. You've got a life sciences center, but it's really sprawling office parks that go on for miles. I got

introduced to the word “collision spaces”—that nobody could walk out and go to lunch with somebody and say, “I’ll meet you down on the corner,” and you each walk a block from your respective business, and you’ve got a choice of a bunch of restaurants. You hang around maybe after work, because you can.

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No one’s hanging around in the office parks after work. So now you’re back home. So I saw pictures of Kennett Square. I heard people talk about that a lot. And it struck me that White Flint is the perfect place for something like this. It was good for Amazon. Frankly, if we do this and we can fill this up with life sciences, it’s worth far more than Amazon in so many different ways. I don’t mean monetarily; I mean in terms of contribution to our culture and our county and society in general. You don’t trump this industry. This is where the future is going. So we are negotiating, been negotiating for a year now, with WMATA. They own the Metro station and 15 acres around it. And our goal was to get a joint development agreement with WMATA. Well, I signed that today, and it’s going to the WMATA board I think tomorrow. We’re hopeful that we’ve got an agreement to jointly develop that Metro station, that the focus is going to be on business and particularly the IT and bio industry.

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We have developers already who have approached us. They believe they can bring bio there. I believe from talking to people that that’s a place that people would see as a next step to expand to. There is something about being on a Metro, in an urban environment, that is attractive to people. The good thing is that I’m a big believer—you know, if you have economic development, it starts with jobs. It does not start with building housing. Because the only way people build housing is if somebody’s got a job, and if that job’s not here, it’s someplace else. I need those jobs to be here. And if I create a center around White Flint that becomes packed and packed with jobs as time goes on, then the developments up and down the Pike that provide housing and entertainment and retail and all of the things that make a place, they’re going to begin to happen. And they’re waiting for a catalyst, and so the development in that sphere is slow in the absence of a catalyst.

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I think this provides a catalyst. And we're also looking at Twinbrook, where U.S. Pharmacopeia is. Because here's a place that's not zoned for the high-rise buildings, but has lots of light industrial spaces that could make good labs, could make good incubators, could create a culture of maker spaces in general. Because I'm interested in incubating not just the bio and sciences, but also incubating other businesses. We look at Twinbrook as being the hip sister or hip brother of a White Flint, and that people might actually—because they're right next to each other, you could leave White Flint and say, "Let's go to this trendy bar or this trendy restaurant that's happening over in Twinbrook." So we actually see this as two parts of the same thing, two parts of the same whole. We think we can do this here. It's not rocket science. Other people have done it. But I think what Montgomery County has lacked for years is our development is basically how many square feet do you allow somebody to build.

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Well, developers don't build square feet unless they've got clients. You don't have clients unless people have a reason to be there. What we want to do is reinvigorate the county by giving people a reason to be here. And I think we can do that.

Rich Bendis:

I think basically you have most of the assets and amenities that are needed around White Flint to be able to accomplish that. Just one word of caution, and that is Research Triangle has taken over 40 years to evolve to what it is today. One of their challenges is that they went elephant hunting, meaning they went for large companies only, and they didn't really focus on the entrepreneurial culture. So it's really having a blend between helping support entrepreneurial and emerging businesses as well as attracting and retaining and growing your existing larger businesses. So it's a nice balance that's needed. I think one of the things the county has to balance that out is you have unique assets that don't exist anywhere else in the United States or the world, by having the FDA and the NIH here. So, really nice to build around.

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Marc Elrich:

We've got a lot of NIH talent that's looking for someplace to go.

Rich Bendis: Sure, yeah. I mean, there's 13,000 people down there in Bethesda, and 6,000 of them are scientists in 27 different research institutes. So that's hard to replicate.

Marc Elrich: That's what interests me in doing a BioHealth incubator—getting people into the incubators, and then getting them into an accelerator program so they can take things to market. We had a meeting with the folks at NIH who actually run the incubator program out on Democracy. They like the idea of something in White Flint. Some of them actually live there. There's a sense that that's the right place. I mean, a lot of what you do depends on the place you're marketing. And you can say, "I want to build x number of square feet of something," but people want to know, what is the x number of square feet gonna look like, and what's gonna be there. It was probably one of the hardest things to sell Amazon was they would occupy the entire thing, and they would be the be-all and end-all of everything, and that's not what somebody needs to be.

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That's a heavy load. They want to be in an environment that their employees from day one can hopefully find housing nearby but can also find the things they want to do nearby. And I think that's the thing, like you said, about White Flint. It's got the core of what makes a viable, livable interesting community, and it's got the potential with the underdeveloped properties, to very rapidly come into play. And those are already zoned for it, so I don't have to go through any zoning machinations to open those things up. In their cases, they just need to see somebody putting in jobs down the street and saying, "I've got housing for those people." So I think this will be symbiotic.

Rich Bendis: So basically we're talking about you have two years left in your first term here. If you look at what your goals are that you think are achievable over in the next two years, those where you're still in a leadership position, what are those things that you think can be accomplished?

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Marc Elrich: If we're just talking about the business world, I think White Flint can get launched. I think we can revamp our incubator network and diversify it. We're just getting finished with the study. I just had a conversation with the gentleman who's leading the study. I thought we did not have a very

good incubator system before. He kind of confirmed that. We are going to take the study to heart and begin to change it. That's a way of generating jobs in this county and opportunities in the county. I'm very interested in diversifying our industrial base. So I think we've got opportunities not just in the sciences but outside the sciences, to just encourage the creative talent. People keep talking about creatives; I need to create a place for creatives. I don't have that place yet. I think that's something we can do. And I think we can get the transit initiative launched. The RT is getting—a light version is coming to 29 that should be followed by an improved version.

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We're looking at plans that eventually will go out to bid for 355 from Bethesda to Clarksburg. And we've done the design of Corridor Cities Transitway so that the folks in the Shady Grove life sciences don't run into a halt sign and not be able to continue to fill the spaces up there. Those things I think we can get done, and then we've got our own, I think, important initiatives. We've got to deal with policing issues. We do not have a terrible police force. We are not in the newspaper every day with the kind of crap that other people are subjected to. But we still have problems. And it creates issues in the community. We've got the ability to deal with it, and I think we've got the political will to deal with it. So we're going to deal with that. And then we do have to figure out what to do about housing. We've got to stop building only one-bedroom apartments. Because you can't hold families if all you build is one-bedroom apartments. God love the planning board, but you can't both say that—go into single-family neighborhoods and get rid of the single-family housing, and in the same breath say that we want a live-work environment where people can stay in the community.

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If I only have a one-bedroom apartment and I get married and have a kid, I am gone. [laugh] I would like to have some three-bedroom apartments or townhouses immediate to Bethesda or White Flint, so that you could say, "I'm moving out of my one-bedroom apartment to a three-bedroom apartment here." And there's some parks and amenities so that I don't have to leave. Because I don't want them having to leave. We've got some challenges. I think we can do this stuff. And you've got a

population, I think, that is eager for change at some levels, but at the same time appreciates the good things they have. And that's a good way to go about change. When people understand what your assets are and think, "There's a lot of good here" and then can look and say, "How do I get better?" that's a whole lot different than feeling like we're in a really terrible place and, "God, I wish I were better." I think it's an easier way to build that way.

Rich Bendis:

Well, I think it starts with a positive attitude and a can-do attitude.

0:37:01

So the glass has to be half-full rather than half-empty, and it sounds like you're coming it at from that approach. So I know there's a lot to be accomplished, but there's a good base to work from in Montgomery County. So, we've been speaking with the county executive for Montgomery County, Marc Elrich. Any closing comments you have that you'd like to have for our listeners before we close this podcast?

Marc Elrich:

We want people to see the potential that's here. We also want people to know that we want your input to develop that potential. I don't walk in everybody else's shoes. And that's true whether I'm talking about the minority community or I'm talking about the scientific community. I know what I know from experience and what I've tried to learn, but I also know that other people, through their experiences and the things they do, bring other levels of learning to the table. And I want people to feel this is a place where you can help shape the future. I'm not going to sit with a magic wand and tell you, "This is what it's gotta be."

0:38:00

This is your community. We want it to be your community, and we want you to feel some ownership in how we get to the place that people would like us to arrive at. And I think that's important for people to know. We really believe—I really believe—that engaging people and listening to people is really, really essential for creating what hopefully is a vision that everybody can buy into.

Rich Bendis:

Well, I want to thank you for the time and sharing your views and your opinions. And I guess your door is always open and you're willing to listen to just about anybody in the county that has an idea for you, right?

Marc Elrich: I pretty much talk to everybody. [laugh]

Rich Bendis: [laugh] Well, I want to thank you for being on *BioTalk*. We have had this pleasure of being with Marc Elrich, the county executive for Montgomery County. And his vision for what we—which is very important to us in the BioHealth industry—that it's something that—a good base that he would like to continue to build upon in the future. And we're here to help support that. We want to see that we can become number one in the country, not number three or number four.

0:39:03

Marc Elrich: Yep!

Rich Bendis: So, thank you very much for your time.

Marc Elrich: Thank you.

Narrator: Thanks for listening to *BioTalk* with Rich Bendis.

End of recording