



Montgomery County 2022 Candidate Questionnaire - David Blair

Personal Information:

Name David Blair

What Office Are You Seeking in the 2022 Election? Montgomery County Executive

Where Can Voters Learn More About Your Positions Or Contact Your Campaign?

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Please Answer the Following Questions- responses will posted in their entirety and will not be edited.

Someone new to Montgomery County may ask, "What's the Ag Reserve and why is it important?" What's your answer?

The Agricultural Reserve is a 93,000-acre section of Montgomery County that is reserved for agricultural use, open space, and forest buffers for streams and other natural resources in a deliberate and forward-thinking effort started more than 40 years ago to protect land from environmentally-damaging sprawl development. It's a model that other jurisdictions around the country have copied in the time since and we must protect it against development pressure now more than ever for its environmental benefit and to protect agriculture.

What is your vision for the future of the County's Agricultural Reserve? Briefly, how would you achieve that vision?

My vision is to protect the Agricultural Reserve and to increase support for agricultural uses - including table crops in order to create a more connected and sustainable local food system. Specifically, my goal is to partner with nonprofit organizations to create a food processing and distribution facility here in Montgomery County where local growers can wash, prepare, package, and ship their produce. This will make it more economically feasible for local farmers to grow food.

What are your priorities regarding stewardship of the County's natural resources (water, forests, open spaces) and parkland?

I will preserve open spaces, protect and seek to expand parkland, and restore lost tree canopy by increasing the amount of trees the County plants a year to 10,000 - similar to an initiative last year in Baltimore County in which they planted 11,000 trees with a focus on equity and neighborhoods where tree canopy had been lost. To better protect our streams from sediment pollution and erosion, I want to reinstate green stormwater infrastructure such as rain gardens, bioswales, tree water retention boxes, and permeable pavers so we're capturing more stormwater before it enters our storm drains and damages streams.

What role will you play with regard to ensure that we safeguard our drinking water supply both surface and groundwater?

Safeguarding the quality of our surface water supply from both the Patuxent and Potomac rivers requires us to preserve the low density and low impervious surface area created by the Agricultural Reserve, increase forest and street tree canopy throughout the County including in non-Agricultural Reserve areas, and prevent pollution and erosion of the streams that flow into these rivers by capturing more stormwater before it hits our storm drains via green infrastructure projects. Unfortunately, these

projects have been mostly abandoned during County Executive Marc Elrich's administration.

Protecting groundwater sources - including the Maryland Piedmont and Poolesville Sole Source Aquifers - also requires us to preserve the low density and low impervious surface area of the Agricultural Reserve and to implement policies and requirements that ensure correctly-installed and maintained on-site septic systems.

What are your top priorities to help the County address climate change? What role will the Ag Reserve play?

I want to triple the amount of solar power generated on County properties and buildings through a more aggressive power purchasing approach utilizing school properties, open and unforested County properties including closed landfills, and County parking infrastructure and buildings. I want to plant 10,000 trees a year (up from the roughly 1,800 the County plants now) and focus on areas where the tree canopy has been degraded over time. I want to implement Countywide curbside composting collection so we can remove the 130,000-160,000 tons of compostable food waste that gets burned at the Dickerson incinerator a year - making better use of our waste and laying the groundwork for a more sustainable and responsible closure of the waste-to-energy incinerator.

What more can be done to support our local farm businesses and rural communities?

Besides a local food processing facility described earlier, I want to create a concerted and strategic Made in Montgomery marketing campaign that identifies and promotes local farm businesses. I think rural communities aren't getting the same level of County services as other places in the County. This includes access to health centers, timely school building revitalizations, assisted transportation services and services that aren't necessarily delivered by County Government but that the County can assist in bringing such as quality grocery stores with fresh food.

What are your regional transportation priorities? Do you support M83 and an additional Potomac bridge and outer beltway through the Reserve or adjacent rural zones?

My transportation priorities are to improve our existing Ride On bus service through a more modern and efficient route map, making free fares permanent, and better app technology to track buses and provide real-time bus crowding information so riders and potential riders have the information they need. I also believe we should be making more progress on dedicated lane Bus Rapid Transit - "true BRT" - and using adaptive traffic signal technology to optimize traffic flow and enable the use of existing lanes for BRT and protected bicycle and pedestrian access. We can work with the State to improve MARC commuter rail service, especially in the midday, improve parking capacity at MARC stations like Germantown, and build master-planned MARC stations that provide easy transfer access to and from the Metro Red Line at places like Shady Grove Metro. I oppose an additional Potomac bridge and outer beltway. I believe M-83 - a six-mile highway master planned to connect Derwood and Clarksburg - is an example of transportation infrastructure promised to Upcounty residents that the County has failed to deliver.

How should our County manage its solid waste? What role should incineration, composting and recycling play?

We should expand our recycling and reuse capacity and implement countywide curbside composting collection for food waste so we can remove the 130,000-160,000 tons of compostable waste being burned annually at the incinerator - laying the groundwork for responsibly and sustainably closing the waste-to-energy incinerator without having to send hundreds of thousands of tons of waste to landfills in other communities. We have to build our own large-scale composting facility and partner with privately-run and public composting facilities in neighboring jurisdictions - such as Arlington County did last year to start its curbside composting program.

What are your views on the general plan update "Thrive 2050," both the process and the draft now before the Council?

There are many good things about Thrive - the update to the County's General Plan. These include its focus on how the shortage of housing has created the affordable housing crisis we're now in and its emphasis on creating the "15-minute" community in which someone can access the services and

amenities they need within 15 minutes, thereby reducing carbon emissions and congestion. I also appreciate the goal it sets out to rebuild and re-engineer the large and unsafe highway-like road corridors in our County so they are safe, attractive, and inviting.

Do you believe that the way that local government branches, state entities, and the public currently interact can be improved? If so, what steps would you take?

Yes. I think that too often only the voices of certain segments of the community are being heard at formal public hearing sessions and through everyday communications with elected officials. Some of the new modes of virtual public input made necessary by health restrictions during the pandemic should remain as additional options for in-person participation, because we know most people in our community aren't able to take time out of their day to attend in-person public hearings, worksessions, or development and master plan reviews. We need to fund the continuation, expansion, and promotion of these virtual public input opportunities, including in other languages and culturally-appropriate formats to reach more members of our community.