



## Montgomery County 2022 Candidate Questionnaire - Joe De Maria

### Personal Information:

**Name** Joe De Maria

**What Office Are You Seeking in the 2022 Election?** Delegate, District 17

### 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?

In 1980, approximately one third of the land area of Montgomery County was set aside as the Agricultural Preserve to protect the natural environment and traditional way of life of the County. People live and work there, but development is regulated to keep the area green and rural. It has been a great success and is very popular with people from throughout the County. I had occasion to travel to Leesburg, Virginia, from Rockville often and I would take some extra time to drive through the Ag Reserve rather than take the highways.

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

The Ag Reserve should remain as it is. The issue is economic development versus preservation. There is a tension between the two, but they aren't mutually exclusive. Agriculture is part of the County's economy and should continue to be. In recent years, the debate has centered around solar power generation in the Ag Reserve. Solar generation should not impact the soil and should complement, not replace, the agricultural economy. The 2 percent cap on land allowed for solar power generation now should be understood as an experiment or prototype. It's impact on the region should be vigorously studied before it is expanded or not.

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

Water, soil and air cannot be thought of separately, we live in an ecosystem. Although some disagree with me, I favor intense but environmentally friendly development near transportation centers, mainly Metro stations, with protected spaces and parkland nearby, rather than low density sprawl in the form of strip malls with huge parking lots. The protected spaces and parks don't have to be enormous. Rockville comes to mind as a model. Rockville has over 60 parks, mostly small, so everyone can walk to a park. That should be a goal state-wide.

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

Water supply and water quality have been affected by climate change and will continue to be. I would favor preventing development of properties close to rivers and reservoirs or having strict environmental controls for development in such areas.

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

With 3,000 miles of tidal coastline in Maryland, rising sea levels due to climate change threatens the economy and way of life of all Marylanders. Legislation to combat climate change in this year's General Assembly sets a new standard for what states can do to address climate change and I fully support it. In the future, we must think of new ways to combat climate change such as mandating that state government properties be "green" and conform to standards such as those set out by Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED). By making preservation of the Ag Reserve a priority, development outside the Reserve will have to be sensible and not harmful to the Reserve. Its preservation stands as our conscience for controlling development outside the Reserve.

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

Nutritional programs which receive state funds could be required to source locally before going out of state, provided prices are comparable. This would create sustainable demand for local farm products.

### **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?**

Transportation planning should accommodate land preservation. The American Legion Bridge between Maryland and Virginia on I-495 should be modernized before another bridge is contemplated. Governors Hogan and Northam had a plan to cooperate to modernize the American Legion Bridge which has been set aside by Governor Youngkin. Rather than another beltway road, we should contemplate a WMATA Metro Belt connecting towns and cities closer in. Now, all Metro lines go through downtown Washington. Rockville and Tysons Corner are seven miles apart, but it takes more than 90 minutes to travel between those two stations via Metro. A direct line would facilitate fast, efficient travel on such a trip and take cars off the road without building through the Ag Reserve.

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

Solid waste is a problem. Exporting it to other states works now, but how long can those states continue to accept our trash? Incineration has environmental downsides and recycling is not as profitable as expected. We need to explore ways that make recycling and composting profitable while reducing use of plastics. The ban on plastic straws in Montgomery County is a good start, so why not ban plastic bags also? Paper or cardboard packaging is biodegradable and works fine in most cases. As a caveat, plastic is excellent for medical and pharmaceutical products which must be kept sterile, but you don't need to keep bananas from the supermarket sterile.

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

Because it is a long-range, comprehensive planning document, the County Council should take its time to consider and hear from all stakeholders. Re-integration of the environment/water quality/climate resilience sections of the

Plan would be good. Whatever Plan emerges from the process, it must be consistent with the County's strategy to combat climate change and preserve the Ag Reserve.

### **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?**

Public officials must consciously rebuild trust in our government institutions. Lack of public trust is a crisis. Elected officials must listen to the public, not just their "base." Officials are elected to represent and serve everyone, not just those who might vote for them. When we see the Black Lives Matter protests and working-class white Americans embrace neo-fascism, it indicates large numbers

of working Americans have lost confidence in the system, even though they express their frustration differently. Leaders need to spend more time reaching out and listening to people who disagree with them.