



## Montgomery County 2022 Candidate Questionnaire - Laurie-Anne Sayles

### Personal Information:

**Name** Laurie-Anne Sayles

**What Office Are You Seeking in the 2022 Election?** Montgomery County Council At-Large

### 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, sometimes referenced as the lungs of our county, is  $\frac{1}{3}$  of our county's landmass and the largest Ag Reserve in the nation. The Ag Reserve generates about \$288M in annual revenue, safeguards our county's resources to protect farmland and agriculture, and supports our growing agribusiness and agritourism industries.

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

I am committed to bringing S.M.A.R.T. government to our county to advance sustainable local food production in the ag reserve and create pathways for entrepreneurs and farmers to start and grow their businesses. Before the pandemic, food insecurity was already an issue but has become a top concern for many residents and local advocates due to rising inflation and uncertainty. As the only Upcounty resident running in the at-large race, we need an upcounty champion to safeguard the integrity of this sacred resource.

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

As a 2017 Gaithersburg Environmentalist of the Year, Chair of the Metropolitan Washington Council of Government Chesapeake Bay & Water Resources Policy Committee, past Vice-Chair of the Interfaith Partners of the Chesapeake, now Legislative Committee member, and recipient of the coveted Sierra Club endorsement shows my commitment to protecting and preserving the integrity of natural resources and their underlying ecosystems for future generations.

I think the County should increase support for forest conservation efforts by partnering with State and Congressional leaders to seek funding for:  
implementing innovative ways to retain and grow our tree canopy which provides an abundance of natural ways to combat climate change, including:

Forming a County Youth Climate Conservation Corps as a possible pilot for the state - to assist with urban garden development, urban tree planting, and restoration projects that can help sequester carbon. Employ youth in summer jobs, focusing on disadvantaged and low-income youth as a priority

Building capacity (e.g., via funding and training) for communities to administer surveys to assess current forest mitigation approaches and evaluate areas for improvement

Increasing skill-based programs and training to expand and improve workforce demands for tree-planting programs

Leveraging public and private funds through traditional and innovative funding streams to secure the funding necessary to ensure Montgomery County's mitigation plantings are native trees

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

I will be a vocal advocate for safeguarding our drinking water supply, both surface and groundwater, by supporting effective environmental services and regulations for residents and businesses in our county –rules for garbage removal, property upkeep, sidewalk cleanliness, and disposal of hazardous materials.

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

Residential and commercial developments are the largest emitters of greenhouse gas emissions, closely followed by vehicle traffic. The Council's pledge to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 80% by 2027 and entirely by 2035 is laudable and ambitious. My SMART agenda calls for:

Strengthening 21st century learning from cradle to career and beyond

Making a living in Montgomery County more affordable

Advancing sustainable local food production in the Ag Reserve

Recovering from the pandemic while revitalizing the economy

Tackling climate change through multi-modal transportation infrastructure

My top priorities include:

Building transit-oriented, affordable residential and commercial developments to lessen the carbon footprint and adhere to the Building Energy Performance Standards recently passed by Montgomery County. This bill establishes the BEPS framework for buildings over 25,000 sq. ft, to meet the county's goal of 60% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 and net-zero by 2045.

We can combat climate change through transportation infrastructure solutions like transitioning MCPS, Ride-On, and county vehicles to renewable energy sources while supporting tax incentives for families and businesses to upgrade their cars to renewable energy.

As a public health advocate, outreach and engagement with our stakeholders are crucial to raising awareness about an issue and influencing behavioral and societal changes. Therefore, partnering with stakeholders like the Ag Reserve, MoCo Food Council, environmentalists, farmers, and our various County Departments to facilitate public outreach campaigns to engage, inform, and empower our diverse communities with information on how to leverage our Ag Reserve to reduce emissions, safeguard our resources, cultivate a local food ecosystem, and model the benefits of composting to advance organic farming and reduce food waste.

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

The Ag Reserve is genuinely an upcounty gem and the lungs of our county. We're very fortunate to have this resource in our backyard. However, the average farmer is nearing retirement, and we have minimal access to an experienced workforce ready to sustain this industry long term. If we're serious about revitalizing our economy as we transition through the uncertainty of COVID, we need to reimagine what that looks like, and that includes:

Advancing local food production in our Ag Reserve by building the infrastructure necessary for these local farm businesses to operate more efficiently, like the recent ribbon-cutting of the Poolesville Grape Crushing and Wine Facility, spurring regional economic development and lessening the impact of climate change

working with MCPS, Montgomery College, and our University of MD Systems to train the next generation of farmers that want to contribute to a sustainable local food ecosystem while partnering with the County's Economic Development Corporation and Visit Montgomery to market and leverage agribusiness and agritourism opportunities.

### **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?**

I support alleviating traffic on our major roads and highways to reduce GHG emissions. Suppose it results in significant tree loss that leaves our tree canopy in further disrepair. In that case, I cannot support such improvements that threaten to harm our environment amid a climate change crisis. As the only Upcounty resident in this race, our neighbors north of me were promised certain transportation guarantees to make their home purchases more attractive. They didn't realize it would take this long to build or implement. So while I support infrastructure improvements like relieving traffic along M83 and offering residents cleaner and more accessible alternatives, the amount of funding we receive from the state and federal levels will determine what more needs to be done to tackle climate change through transportation infrastructure improvements, starting with cleaner bus lines with road enhancements along the same route as M83 to see if prior commuter levels are different post-pandemic, before making long term irreversible infrastructure decisions. Again, traffic relief will happen when teleworking becomes more permanent. We start to fully fund multi-modal transit solutions to see what traffic relief occurs when we build infrastructure that makes it easier and more convenient for commuters and people to navigate business centers, workplaces, and recreational activities. We should not be focused on adding more lanes and making permanent changes until we see the impacts of transit projects included in the master plan for decades.

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

The incinerator should be closed when the contract expires in 2026 while exploring ways the county can move toward a sustainable Zero Waste alternative for all waste streams. I also support setting a measurable zero goal and a county implementation plan to divert more waste and reduce per capita waste generation. The cleaner our waste streams, the more value this waste holds for reusing, recycling, and composting. I support outreach and education policies to ensure buy-in is central to the mission. Having passed and introduced a composting program in our city, I support policies like mandatory composting that San Francisco introduced in 2003 to achieve zero waste by 2020. However, they found it an impossible goal to reach that quickly. The city is still a global leader in waste management, having implemented aggressive strategies to minimize trash and increase recycling through technological innovation, behavioral modification, and legislature. As the first city in the US to make composting mandatory while also banning non-recyclable, non-compostable single-use containers for food service back in 2007, once buy-in is achieved, we should incentivize people to maintain progress until goals are achieved. Moreover, mandatory recycling ordinances and the proper infrastructure and education investments are in place. Advancing local food production in the Ag Reserve is one of the policy platform ideas I'm championing in my race for County Council At-Large. Composting plays a massive role in enriching the soil for local farmers with the nutrient-rich waste developed from composting.

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

Having spent the last year, during the pandemic and a racial reckoning, finalizing and unanimously passing the master plan for Lakeforest Mall, I understand a great deal of transparency and engagement necessary for a community to understand what is being proposed and the benefits of having an appropriate timeframe for residents and stakeholders to contribute their ideas and concerns to inform the final product better. While some believe the level of outreach and engagement has been appropriate, as someone who regularly evaluates and approves master plans and project plans, I think The County Council could spend more time engaging the public on the intended goals of THRIVE 2050. I also believe there is a

considerable opportunity to amplify what the county stands to gain to ensure unanimous support from the County Council.

While I support the principles in THRIVE, I would encourage stakeholders to clarify and amplify what the county and its residents will gain rather than what homeowners stand to lose to increase buy-in and avoid confusion from competing ZTA legislation related to housing types. When the final THRIVE plan is approved, I will use this resource and the current permitting/planning process to thoroughly vet all projects before voting on their approval or denial.

**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?**

Indeed, the fundamentals ensure a process for checks and balances, but there's always room for improvement.

As a former local elected official, I recommend the following steps to improve intergovernmental relations across all levels and with the public:

The federal government should not dictate orders to state or local government organizations. Further, state and federal legislation should not preempt local authority in determining the allocation of administrative and financial responsibilities within localities.

Stakeholders should meet well before introducing legislation at all levels to coordinate, authorize, and appropriate funding to address various shared challenges and opportunities.

The Office of Legislative Oversight should work with the county's inspector general to hold local government accountable while monitoring and evaluating program and policy outcomes.

Should I be elected to serve as an at-large councilmember, my top priorities are to be a good steward of our county's resources, work with the other County Council members on behalf of all Montgomery County residents to move our County forward, and implement my policy agenda for a S.M.A.R.T. government that voters can find on my campaign website at [www.laurieannesayles.org](http://www.laurieannesayles.org).