



## Montgomery County 2022 Candidate Questionnaire - Marilyn Balcombe

### Personal Information:

**Name** Marilyn Balcombe

**What Office Are You Seeking in the 2022 Election?** Montgomery County Council - District 2

### 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?

I've lived in the Upcounty for almost 30 years and given my advocacy and involvement, I'm often asked to give talks on the history of Germantown. I typically start with the concept of Wedges and Corridors and the creation of the Ag Reserve and its relationship to the corridor "cities". I explain that the Ag Reserve is 93,000 acres of protected land that was created in the 1980s to protect farmland from future development. Depending on the audience I go into detail on transfer development rights and how the density in some areas of the County is a trade-off for protecting the Ag Reserve.

I fully support the protection of the Ag Reserve. It is important for farming, recreation and for protection of air quality, water quality, and biodiversity of flora and fauna. Often referred to as the "lungs of the County", we are fortunate to have this important resource in our County.

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

My vision for the future of the Agricultural Reserve is much the same as the vision when it was originally established - to protect farmland and agriculture in perpetuity. It's easy for me to understand the vital nature of the Ag Reserve because it is right in my backyard. I walk the C&O canal, I visit the wineries, I travel the rural roads. The Ag Reserve is one of the reasons I love living in the Upcounty.

I also know the history of how the Ag Reserve was developed as part of the overall planning concept for the County. We made a significant land-use deal and we need to stick to it. To ensure that the Ag Reserve is continually protected, we need to continually educate the rest of the County as to why the Ag Reserve is important to the entire County. We also need to support farmers to make sure they can continue earning a living through farming.

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

The protection of our streams and watershed is one of the most important environmental concerns for everyone in the County. We have several areas in the County with "poor" or "fair" rating of our subwatersheds and only a few areas with "excellent" health. I support the County's efforts to continue

monitoring these areas to reduce water pollution, and clean up our watershed. The County also needs to increase its support for reforestation efforts and work with the State delegation to increase funding for State Parks located in Montgomery County.

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

Admittedly, safeguarding our water supply is not my area of expertise. The first thing I would do on the Council is to listen to environmental experts with far more knowledge on the subject. I will need to learn about what is currently being done, what we are doing right, what still needs to be done.

The Council controls the budget and policy regarding our environment. The Council must commit to protecting and preserving the Ag reserve, as well as preserving / reforesting our tree canopy throughout the county. Protecting our forest is the first line of a multiple barrier approach to protecting our drinking water. We also need to prevent future runoff into our water sources are essential to safe drinking water.

My understanding is that stormwater pollution is one of the biggest threats to the surrounding waterways. We need to ensure the use of best practices in Montgomery County.

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

So many things must be done to mitigate climate change, I would start with the County's Climate Action Plan and determine our immediate, short-term, intermediate, and long-term goals.

My priorities would include:

- working with state and federal resources to bring a more robust EV infrastructure to the county.
- ensure new buildings are built and old are retrofitted to be green and sustainable.
- support a more robust buy local program in the County. Each product that is bought locally, whether its crops from the Ag Reserve or everyday household items, reduces our carbon footprint. As a Chamber of Commerce executive, I strongly support shop local initiatives. Not only is it good for our economy it is best for our environment.
- we must reimagine our way of living and encourage folks to live sustainably.
- we must maintain our green spaces and tree canopy.
- See further comments about transportation and our waste stream.

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

People outside of the Ag Reserve tend to see farms as quaint tourist attractions and a nostalgic look at a simpler time. But we need to enforce the understanding that farming is a business and farmers rely on a certain profit margin to remain viable. As a Councilmember, I would work closely with farmers to understand their needs and identify ways the County can support their sustainability.

I support the County's Department of Agriculture and the incentives in place to help support farming in the County. As the Executive Director of a local chamber of commerce, I strongly believe in the "shop local" movement. We need to push the "Made in MoCo" label as well as work with grocery store chains to purchase from local farms. This is part of educating the general public as to the importance of EVERYONE supporting the Ag Reserve.

### **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?**

- For the Ag Reserve, the most pressing, immediate transportation issue is the reopening of White's Ferry. Montgomery County and the State have very little power in moving this project along but should be doing everything in their power to reopen the Ferry.
- My top regional priority is the expansion of the America Legion Bridge. This is a significant bottleneck in the region for commuters and interstate traffic. I also support increased capacity on I-270, but would focus efforts North of Germantown

- My top transit project would be increased capacity of the MARC rail system, with all day rail service.
- I do support M83. Clarksburg is a good example of a corridor "city" that was planned in conjunction with the creation of the Ag Reserve. The County allowed significant development to occur in Clarksburg, assuming the transportation infrastructure in the Master Plan. The houses were built, the people moved in, the infrastructure did not occur.
- I would not support an additional bridge crossing.

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

I support curbside composting. I know other jurisdictions have implemented the program with success. I compost in the backyard and it significantly reduces my own trash. But the only way to really make a dent in compostable waste is curbside composting.

I support the pilot study for Pay As You Throw, to provide a reasonable allowance for curbside waste and then charge additional fee for excess trash. We also need to increase recycling at commercial office buildings.

In addition to recycling, we need to look at reducing waste to begin with. I would like to look at how to reduce the amount of waste in packaging goods.

Ideally, we can get to the point of closing the incinerator, but we aren't there yet. I am not in favor of shipping our trash to other jurisdictions for disposal.

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

Thrive 2050 is the county's plan for the next 50 years, and for the most part I support the focus on additional housing. We need more housing along our transit nodes and we need more housing options to support increased affordability. However, as I have mentioned in my testimonies before the Planning Board and Council, I do not believe this plan adequately addresses the future of the Upcounty. If this was called "Thrive 2050 for the Urban Core", I wouldn't have as much concern. However, it fails to recognize some of the most diverse, and fastest growing portions of our county.

The critical aspect of Thrive 2050 is that it will most likely pass THIS Council. It will be up to the next several Councils to determine how the General Plan will be implemented and incorporated into the various area Master Plans. Future Councils will make decisions as to where, when, and how additional housing will be added to our existing housing stock. It is imperative that protection of the Ag Reserve remains a priority for the County.

### **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?**

There is current tension between the Executive and Legislative branches of County government. It has caused another layer of inefficiency in local government. We will have a very new Council in 2022 which provides an opportunity to reset. We need to elect strong local leaders who can create a collegial working relationship between the two bodies.

As for State, I believe the relationship between the delegation, the council, and the CE is effective. I have a close working relationship with the State delegation which will be helpful in getting the resources the County needs from the State.

Community outreach can always be improved. Unfortunately, the squeaky wheel gets the grease. The more savvy a community entity is at getting their voices heard, the better their chance of success. This works for savvy organizations, but not for the masses. Strong constituent service is crucial to equitable access.

On the council, I will continue these partnerships, and work closely with the state and local leaders, most of whom I know personally – to bring resources to the Upcounty.