



Montgomery County 2022 Candidate Questionnaire - Natalie Ziegler

Personal Information:

Name Natalie Ziegler

What Office Are You Seeking in the 2022 Election? State Delegate D9A

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

www.NatalieforDelegate.com

As the owner/operator of a feed grain farm in the Howard County, MD Agricultural Land Preservation Program, I am delighted to learn about the Montgomery Countryside Alliance. You are preaching to the choir, and many thanks for the work you do!

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 Ag Reserve is an impressive 93,000 acres of land reserved for farmland and open space in Montgomery County. Its importance lies in the many benefits it provides Montgomery County's residents and economy, from the millions of dollars contributed annually by farms, to the many benefits enjoyed by all residents, from cleaner air and water, to fresh local food, pick-your own and farmer's markets, beautiful scenery, and the restorative connection to nature that is so important to all of us.

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

My vision is of a thriving farming community that produces a significant percentage of the county's and surrounding area's food, including organic produce, organic dairy products, and humanely and pasture raised chicken, beef etc., along with open space for public use planted with non-invasive, pollinator friendly plants and trees.

I truly believe this is what most voters want as well, so I believe it is achievable through a mixture of education and outreach, funding and support for ag education, for incentives to switch to restorative agriculture practices and grants for new ag practices, eg greenhouses, etc.

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

I was delighted to see the passage of the the Great Maryland Outdoors Act, which will give much needed funding for staffing and upkeep to our state parks, which so many of us relied on during the pandemic. I can't choose between these natural resources and can only say that a world without natural open spaces, forest and clean water is a truly horrible thought.

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

We need to support and expand MDE testing for PFAS contamination and follow emerging EPA

guidelines expected in 2023, along with banning their use in firefighting foam.

I will vote to fully fund measures to limit runoff from farms such as cover crop programs and incentives to plant tree buffers near streams.

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

The Ag Reserve plays a tremendous role in addressing climate change, first just by not contributing to it the way it would if it was one big subdivision, with people driving cars, heating and cooling houses, driving gas powered lawn mowers, dumping chemicals on their lawns, using and throwing away masses of plastic bags, wrappers, bottles and containers, and doing all the other planet unfriendly things that we all do in the course of modern life.

It also serves to cool the more suburban and urban areas nearby. The plants and trees take in carbon dioxide and are a net carbon sink. The Reserve also represents a tremendous opportunity for further mitigating climate change through restorative farming practices that are just beginning to be practiced more widely.

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

Two non-negotiable needs for rural communities are broadband and access to convenient, quality health care and mental health care, both issues brought to the forefront by the pandemic. Education about the role farms play in food security, in addition to the many environmental benefits they offer from carbon sequestration, cooling and animal and bird habitat would both support local farms and help gain support for funding needed infrastructure such as broadband in rural communities.

In addition, there are many ways we can support our local farms. Examples include: expanding the opportunities for farmers to earn income from agritourism activities, on-farm butchering facilities, food hubs and the like. We could fund the infrastructure necessary for our schools to make meals from scratch (as California is doing), allowing or requiring schools to contract with local farms for the produce they need, improving nutrition, strengthening our food security, reducing transportation costs and the associated carbon footprint, and expanding the customer base for our local farms.

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 a transit first approach rather than endlessly spending millions to try and build our way out of our traffic problems. Over the decades that I have lived here, I've seen endless construction/widening of roads and highways, and it only seems to encourage more development and more driving, and we soon end up back where we started, but with more cars on the road.

It's going to be a major and difficult change for us Americans to make, but if we want a livable world, we are going to have to change the way we do things.

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

Sweden and Denmark both have successful household composting facilities and I would love to see what we could do here to compost the 40 million tons of food Americans waste each year. We should certainly do everything we can to recycle as much as possible, but we also have to stop producing so much plastic. I would like to see incentives for manufacturers who get rid of plastic packaging. I am opposed to incineration.

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

As a Howard County resident, I have read about, but not lived through, the Thrive 2050 process, and I am sure I have much to learn! That said, there is a lot to like about the document- starting with the intention to look at what is working and not working, and to plan for the future. Howard and

Montgomery share the challenge of having a lot of land in some form of agricultural preservation- something I am extremely grateful for, but it has pushed land prices into nosebleed territory, and millenials are having a terrible time finding affordable housing. We are also dealing with seriously overcrowded schools in some parts of the county and under capacity schools where there is more land in preservation. I strongly support efforts to create "Missing Middle" housing, along with the goals in the document to emphasize equity, transit, redevelopment, the environment, and the relevance of 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?

To start with, government agencies need to have critical appointments filled, salaries set at a level sufficient to attract talent in a tight job market, and technology sufficient to get the job done efficiently. Certainly the pandemic has not helped, but there is no excuse for the problems Marylanders had getting unemployment checks, to name one egregious example. As I knock doors I have heard an earful about the Maryland Department of Health and how difficult it has been to renew licenses, etc. This is a wealthy state, and our citizens deserve efficient, responsive and fully staffed government agencies that make citizen outreach and communication a priority.