



## Montgomery County 2022 Candidate Questionnaire - Andrew Friedson

### Personal Information:

**Name** Andrew Friedson

**What Office Are You Seeking in the 2022 Election?** Montgomery County Council, District 1

### 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 remains essential to preserving Montgomery County's agricultural heritage and protecting farmers and our environment against suburban sprawl. It is critical to maintaining green space, supporting local food sources and crop producers, and fulfilling smart growth principles. As the District 1 Councilmember, I have had the privilege of representing the unique geographic diversity that Montgomery County has to offer – urban, suburban, and rural – which only the Agricultural Reserve makes possible. That's why I have focused so much energy into safeguarding our county's treasure and this national model for land conservation and sustainable land use practices.

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

In order to ensure the Agricultural Reserve is environmentally sustainable, it must also be economically sustainable for our farm families. That means ensuring that agriculture remains the primary function of the Agricultural Reserve, that we have adequate funding for agricultural preservation and our Office of Agriculture, and we continue to educate county residents, especially our young people, on the relevance and importance of our Ag community. That's exactly what we've been focused on with efforts I led to protect our most precious soils when permitting commercial solar arrays, increasing and dedicating funding for agricultural preservation easements, adding resources and staff to the Office of Agriculture, expanding capacity for onsite farm composting, and expanding the successful Ag in the Classroom program. We also must build on our recent success to build partnerships between local farmers and area food banks, as well as growing our agritourism with farm breweries and wineries with efforts like the new Crossvines grape-crushing and banquet facility at Poolesville Golf Course.

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

Protecting our water supply, open spaces and forests is critical to the health and well-being of all county residents. These are not optional endeavors. We need to continue to review and re-evaluate our forest conservation policies, our stormwater infrastructure and policies and our building codes and zoning ordinance to ensure that we are using best practices. I will continue to look to the experts at the Department of Environmental Protection to help guide our county in our stewardship of our natural

resources and work with the Parks Department and the Planning Department to ensure we are doing all we can to care for our existing parklands as well as plan for future park acquisitions. This has been a priority in our down county master plans for places like Bethesda and Silver Spring in order to combat the heat island effect and to improve quality of life in those areas. We need to preserve open space in the upcounty and the down county. Both are important. As Lead for Parks on the Council, I have been and will continue to be a fierce champion for the resources to continue these important stewardship efforts.

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

Protecting and preserving the Agricultural Reserve and our precious land and water have been a top priority of mine in my first term as the County Council's As Lead for Parks and a member of the Planning, Housing and Economic Development Committee, I have worked closely with community-based organizations like Montgomery Countryside Alliance, allies and subject matter experts, and I will continue to work with you and others to dig into the data and the details to lead on safeguarding our drinking water. Smart, sustainable transit-oriented growth is an environmental imperative and a top priority of mine.

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

Protecting and preserving the Ag Reserve will continue to be a top priority of mine. In conjunction with smart land use policies that reduce vehicle miles traveled and control sprawl, it plays a central role in the County's efforts to combat climate change by limiting sprawl. The most important things we can do to build a sustainable future for our county is to focus as much new growth as possible in our urban, transit-oriented corridors. We need to create places where people can live, work and play so we can become less car-reliant.

The landmark Green Buildings Now Act passed by Councilmember Hucker and I will leverage our energy tax revenues to help building owners make their properties more energy efficient and we can build on the farm composting ZTA Councilmember Glass and I passed earlier this term to increase composting options until the County is able to build its own composting facility. We need to continue to protect open spaces, our drinking water supply, and increase our tree canopy throughout the county,

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

We need to build on our successes to date. Preservation of land for agricultural is the most important thing we can do to ensure a long-term, vibrant future for agriculture in Montgomery County. Simply put, we need more funding dedicated to purchase of agricultural easements and I have worked to increase these dollars during my term. I have been an ardent supporter of the Office of Agriculture and have worked closely with OAG staff to ensure they have the resources they need to do their work on behalf of the agricultural community. I have advocated for resources to continue the popular Ag in the Classroom program and approved funding for two badly needed new positions for FY 23. In the past I have successfully advocated for additional funding for cost sharing grants that help provide farmers with critical infrastructure needed to operate their businesses successfully such as deer fences. Food insecurity continues to rise in our county and consequently we continue to work with farmers and the Food Council to secure more funding to purchase crops from local producers and form partnerships with local consumers and advocacy groups working tirelessly to combat hunger.

Our rural communities have unique needs that need to be recognized by those making county policies. There are health disparities that need to be addressed by bringing services our to rural communities, there are unique transportation challenges, and unique economic challenges. During my term I have worked closely with the Poolesville community to address these issues. We have made some significant progress but there is still much work to do. If re-elected I will continue to advocate for all residents of the agricultural 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?**

I have a number of significant transportation priorities, but some of the top regionally focused projects include: fully building out a countywide Bus Rapid Transit network (starting with MD 355, MD 29, and Veirs Mill), the Corridor Cities Transitway, priority trails, bikeways, sidewalks, and Vision Zero safety improvements, as well as the North Bethesda Transitway. I don't support a second Potomac River bridge or the outer beltway for several reasons. They are not environmentally or economically feasible and would drive a stake through the heart of the Agricultural Reserve. M-83 is not in and would not serve my district, so it has not been a focus of mine. However, I do have concerns with the costs and environmental impact and believe the county should be able to develop a plan that addresses the clear need to provide more efficient alternatives for Montgomery County residents to travel between Gaithersburg and Clarksburg with a more modern approach than one that was developed in the 1960s, with an emphasis on transit alternatives.

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

I strongly support Montgomery County's Zero Waste goal so we can reduce and hopefully eliminate our reliance on incineration and land-filling. The key is developing and executing an implementation plan. I certainly think we can do better in increasing recycling and decreasing the generation of waste. I participated this fall in the launch of the Montgomery County Food Scraps Recycling Partnership where Westfield Montgomery and MCPS had recently joined as well as several smaller organizations and businesses. In addition to the recently launched residential composting pilot program in two neighborhoods in Silver Spring and Potomac, these are positive steps forward, but they don't come close to the scale required to move where we need to go. The most significant need to advance these efforts and bring them to scale is a full-scale commercial composting facility similar to Prince George's County. We can also build significantly on our efforts to expand farm composting as we did in the zoning text amendment Councilmember Evan Glass and I co-led earlier this term.

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

In policymaking and especially land use, it's not just the "who," it's the "how" and "with whom." Starting with the first meeting of the Planning, Housing & Economic Development (PHED) Committee discussing Thrive 2050, I've consistently discussed the need to follow established processes and continued to push for additional public engagement, including the addition of multiple Council listening sessions which then ultimately expanded to additional public meetings through the Regional Services Center.

I believe that the county's general plan should be - must be - a high-level strategic vision document - not an implementation document. This is why I spoke out when one of my colleagues introduced an attainable housing measure (ZTA 20-07) before the Council had even begun its review of Thrive. I urged the Council to put that legislation on hold which it ultimately did. Where verbiage in the Planning Board Draft implied approval of specific actions, rather than a broad vision for how the County should grow, I made sure that language was changed because simply put, words matter and we must get this document right. In addition, I also clarified that the List of Actions that is part of the appendix will not be approved with the Thrive. This List of Actions has unfortunately been presented as a road map of predetermined actions- creating some understandable concern and confusion that this once-in-a-generation exercise is in fact, a fait accompli. That would not be appropriate.

Moving forward, we will re-examine the PHED Committee draft, review the racial equity and social justice analysis we will receive in September, and determine what, if any, additions need to be made to the text. More broadly speaking and specific to the agricultural reserve, we need to ensure that the final document honors and reinforces the rich history and purpose of the area and that it continues to protect our rural areas from sprawl and guide our county towards a more sustainable future.

## **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?**

Communication can always improve and Montgomery County, related public agencies and state government are certainly no exception. We learned from the pandemic that we can pivot and change when necessary. We just need the will to make it happen. The Council must improve our public participation process if we are to adequately engage our diverse population and craft policy that serves all residents. We need to continue providing hybrid opportunities to engage both virtually and in person. Residents shouldn't have to come to Rockville to meet their Councilmembers or to follow our deliberations over policies that impact their lives. The Council needs to get more creative and proactive in how we engage residents by attending cultural events, holding fun/engaging informational activities in communities, using targeted advertising, and other types of diverse outreach. We need to find out where various communities and age groups get their information and then utilize those mediums. To accomplish this, we will need to continue to bolster our public information office, reorganize our Central Staff to serve the modern needs of our community, and ensure they have the resources they need to serve our diverse community.