

Name: **Bill Conway**
Address: Potomac
What office are you seeking?: County Council At Large
Where can voters learn more about your positions?: www.billconwayforcouncil.com

2 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 a part of Montgomery County that has been reserved for local agriculture through the enactment of development restrictions. It comprises approximately 90,000 acres in the western and northern parts of the County and was created in a far-sighted decision more than 40 years ago. In addition to providing a source of local food, the Ag Reserve is a stunning amenity whose existence in the metroplex is more remarkable every year. It is the County's green lungs and Central Park - a place to recharge the soul and a haven for recreation.

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

Forest, open spaces and parkland are precious resources worth conserving for their own sake, and once they are lost they are very difficult to regain. But the resource that they all have a substantial effect upon is water. Controlling runoff and providing vegetative filtration are keys to maintaining water quality - both surface water and groundwater. Thus, the minimization of impervious surfaces, the maintenance of forests and tree buffers, preservation of open space and wetlands, and avoiding channelization in favor of meanders in stream valley parks are all things that have a major effect on maintaining water quality. In the Ag Reserve these measures are particularly important as the population is almost solely dependent upon the Poolesville sole source aquifer and the larger Maryland Piedmont sole source aquifer. For me maintaining water quality is the priority that joins together my concerns for stewardship of forests, open spaces and parkland.

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

The pressures for development are not going away, and the Ag Reserve will be under a degree of threat until it is known and cherished by most Montgomery County residents. Only when the people as a whole become its protector will it be safe. While the public profile of the Reserve has increased over the years, there is still a long way to go. At the same time, the people who live in the Reserve need to have an adequate economic foundation to be able to live there. Accordingly, my vision is to encourage the growth of agriculture in the Reserve that will support the local economy but also create links to Montgomery County residents who live elsewhere. This is not a new idea, but it is a sensible one. Small wineries, farms that grow high quality produce, artisanal producers of woolen goods, and cheese makers are all examples of economically viable businesses that rely on local agriculture and also attract Montgomery County customers.

5 Can you identify some of the top challenges to the Reserve's local agriculture and what actions you would take, if elected, to address them?

The main challenges to agriculture in the Reserve are economic. Farming of any kind is a tough business. Larger “agribusiness” farms operate within a regional commodity market. While they have their own difficulties, they generally do not lack an outlet for their products. However, my sense is that smaller farms growing produce and specialty products may struggle to find adequate markets, and the County could help in that regard. In addition, many farmers are older and looking to retire but would like to keep their land in production. MCA’s Land Link program has helped to match these farmers and other landowners with younger people who want to start in farming but lack access to land. The County could take a role in expanding the reach of Land Link.

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

As indicated above, there is still a lack of awareness of the Ag Reserve and its benefits among many County residents. I think there is a role for the County to play in raising awareness of the Ag Reserve. For example, why not devote a day to teaching public school students about the Ag Reserve as part of standard curriculum in history or civics?

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

The County should take the actions necessary to close the Dickerson incinerator when its contract is up for renewal in 2021. In preparation for that step the County should work to substantially reduce its solid waste stream through a combination of recycling and composting. Food waste is currently a significant part of our waste stream. Home composting, while not available to everyone, is a viable alternative for many homeowners and therefore is a relatively easy first step. Even with substantially increased recycling and composting some residual use of landfills will be necessary.

8 How can we expand the role the County's schools play in the support of a healthy local food system and the success of local agriculture? Do you support a rural schools' policy that provides equity for Reserve cluster schools acknowledging the unique nature of schools in region set aside for farmland and open space preservation?

The County has a strong role to play in raising the profile of the Ag Reserve. As indicated above, promoting the Reserve, healthy food and local agriculture could be a standard part of MCPS curriculum. That could include structuring time - whether field trips or short internships - spent in the Reserve. In an area set aside for open space and agricultural preservation the relative numbers of school age children will be low. As a result, school planners have a tendency to want to close schools in the Ag Reserve in order to save costs. However, closing schools undermines local communities and ultimately the purposes of the Ag Reserve itself. For that reason I oppose efforts to close schools in the Ag Reserve.

9 Currently the County is exploring how best to support a strong agricultural economy through agritourism and new farming enterprises such as on farm breweries and wineries. What are your thoughts about how best to advance on farm activities within the context of the master plan?

As indicated above, I think that agritourism and new businesses such as wineries are important for supporting the continued success of the Ag Reserve. However, consistent with the master plan I think that these activities have to be judged with respect to their scale and impact on the Reserve as a whole. We need more economic activity in the Reserve to guarantee its future, but if it becomes a giant theme park it will have lost its character. One self-regulating requirement could be that all (or an appropriate percentage) of the inputs used by an enterprise be grown in the Reserve.

10 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?

My transportation focus is on improved mass transit including permanent Metro funding, construction of the Purple Line, new BRT service, and expanded MARC and better Ride-On service. I also support traffic demand management per the recent Transportation Planning Board study and use of advance traffic signal technology. I oppose M-83 and a second bridge crossing into and through the Ag Reserve. In lieu of a second bridge I would support the construction of two reversible lanes with BRT on I-270 and widening of the American Legion Bridge.