

# Montgomery County 2026 Candidate Questionnaire



## Personal Information:

**Name** Hamza Khan

**What Office Are You Seeking in the 2026 Election?** County Council At-Large

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

Voters can contact us at:

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Instagram: @HamzaPolitics  
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**Please Answer the Following Questions- responses will posted in their entirety and will not be edited. There are no word limits but please try to be concise.**

(pictured above: One Acre Farm)

## Please share 3 sentences that help us to know you better:

I'm a lifelong Montgomery County resident, community organizer, and public affairs professional who has spent my career building coalitions across lines of race, religion, class, and ideology to advance social justice and good governance. I earned my M.A. in Democracy & Governance from Georgetown University, where I focused on the decline of local democracy and public trust in institutions, and previously served as Field Director for County Council candidate Ag-Reserve resident Beth Daly's grassroots At-Large campaign. My local advocacy efforts have included environmental advocacy to help protect Ten Mile Creek, criminal justice reform through the Juvenile Restoration Act, labor organizing through Fight for \$15, and local preservation efforts with the Bethesda African Cemetery Coalition.

**When we recently surveyed residents throughout the County, they shared that their top priority was a lack of government transparency - How can Montgomery County ensure transparency in their legislative and land use decision making? How would you grade current public engagement? Do you support re-establishing the Office of the People's Counsel?**

I *strongly* support re-establishing the Office of the People's Counsel as an independent watchdog for residents. Land use and development decisions can permanently reshape communities, yet ordinary residents often lack the resources, legal expertise, and institutional access available to politically connected interests and major developers. An independent People's Counsel would help restore balance, improve transparency, strengthen accountability, and ensure residents have meaningful representation in decisions that affect their neighborhoods, environment, infrastructure, and quality of life. In my opinion: the defunding of the agency is deliberate and ethically unjustifiable.

After working for a range of political campaigns and county and state officials earlier in my career, I experienced a serious crisis of faith in Montgomery County's democratic culture and public institutions. I became increasingly concerned that many residents were consistently shut out of major decisions – particularly when their interests did not align with those in power – while transparency and accountability often took a back seat to insider processes. That experience ultimately pushed me to pursue a master's degree in Democracy & Governance at Georgetown University, where I focused on democratic decline, rebuilding public trust, and strengthening local democracy.

I'm a lifelong Montgomery County resident, community organizer, and public policy professional who has spent much of my career building coalitions across lines of race, religion, class, and ideology to advance social justice and good governance. I previously served as Field Director for Beth Daly's grassroots At-Large County Council campaign, and my advocacy work has included helping protect Ten Mile Creek, supporting the Fight for \$15 movement, advancing the Juvenile Restoration Act, and working alongside the Bethesda African Cemetery Coalition on issues of preservation and historical justice.

At its core, my campaign is about restoring public trust, defending democratic accountability, and ensuring that ordinary residents – not just the politically connected – have a meaningful voice in shaping Montgomery County's future.

The People's Counsel must be re-established.

**Do you believe that the way that local government branches (executive, legislative and planning), and state entities currently interact can be improved? If so, what steps would you take to bring better collaboration?**

Yes – but I also believe Montgomery County needs to rethink not just coordination between institutions, but the concentration of power itself. Based both on my academic research in democracy and governance, and my experience working in local politics, I believe it is time for a meaningful devolution of power back toward local communities, including greater localized input over zoning and land use decisions that directly shape neighborhood character and quality of life.

Too often, residents feel that decisions are made through a top-down process where communities are consulted late, rather than empowered early. While regional planning and countywide coordination remain important, local residents should have a far stronger voice in determining how growth, infrastructure, transportation, environmental protection, and development occur within their communities.

I also believe we need structural democratic reforms to restore public trust and participation. Montgomery County's voter turnout in many local elections is alarmingly low, yet partisan primaries frequently determine the outcome of races long before the general election occurs. In practice, this means many residents feel politically excluded from the most consequential stages of local decision-making. I support exploring alternatives to closed partisan primaries that would broaden participation, strengthen democratic legitimacy, and encourage candidates to speak to the entire community rather than narrow political factions.

For my part, I would advocate for the County's four At-Large Councilmembers and their district counterparts to receive funding to establish hyperlocal constituent service offices and dedicated staff

presence throughout different regions of Montgomery County – including a permanent office presence serving the Agricultural Reserve and Upcounty communities. Residents should not feel that government only exists in Rockville or only becomes visible during election season. A more localized government presence would improve responsiveness, transparency, collaboration, and public trust.

At the same time, collaboration between the County Executive, County Council, Planning Board, state agencies, WSSC, DEP, and other entities absolutely needs improvement. Agencies frequently operate in silos, creating fragmented policymaking, inconsistent implementation, and confusion for residents. I would support earlier interagency coordination on major projects, stronger transparency requirements, shared long-term planning benchmarks, and clearer public accountability when agencies fail to communicate effectively with one another or with the public.

Ultimately, restoring trust in government requires more than administrative efficiency – it requires giving residents meaningful democratic ownership over the decisions that shape their daily lives.



**Source water protection is a priority for County residents. Rural residents are served by wells drawn from a federally designated Sole Source Aquifer. What specific actions will you take to protect groundwater quality and ensure a sustainable supply of drinking water for residents, farms and businesses? And what do you propose with regard to protecting the Potomac River, a drinking water supply for more than 5 Million people in the Washington DC metropolitan area. Given increasing drought conditions, growing data center water consumption, and projections that the Potomac River may not meet future demand, how will you plan for a water-constrained future? What policies or investments would you prioritize during your term?**

Protecting our water supply is not an abstract policy issue for me – it is something I have been actively involved in as an organizer and advocate here in Montgomery County. I was proud to be a leader in the Save Ten Mile Creek Coalition, which fought to protect one of the cleanest waterways in the region from irresponsible development and environmental degradation. That experience reinforced for me how fragile our ecosystems are, and how easily short-term political and development pressures can create long-term environmental consequences.

Montgomery County must take a far more precautionary approach toward source water protection moving forward. Rural residents who rely on wells connected to the federally designated Sole Source Aquifer deserve strong protections against contamination, overdevelopment, and unsustainable groundwater depletion. That means stronger environmental oversight, more aggressive groundwater monitoring, protection of stream buffers and forested land, careful scrutiny of high-impact development proposals, and investments that help farmers implement best practices to reduce runoff while keeping agriculture economically viable.

The Potomac River is equally critical, not just to Montgomery County, but to the entire region. As climate change intensifies drought conditions and water demand increases, we must begin planning now for a water-constrained future rather than assuming historic supply levels will continue indefinitely. That includes regional cooperation with neighboring jurisdictions, major investments in watershed restoration and green infrastructure, modernization of aging water systems to reduce leakage and waste, and stronger long-term conservation planning.

I also believe Montgomery County must carefully evaluate whether proposed hyperscale data centers and

other high-consumption facilities are compatible with our long-term water sustainability goals. We cannot discuss climate resilience and source water protection while ignoring the extraordinary resource demands some of these projects would place on our infrastructure and environment.

I have previously stated publicly that I will not support hyperscale data centers that are not paired with fully clean energy solutions and rigorous environmental safeguards. Any proposal involving major energy or water consumption must meet the highest possible standards for sustainability, water conservation, grid impact mitigation, and environmental accountability before receiving public support.

Ultimately, protecting our water supply requires political courage and long-term thinking. Once aquifers, rivers, and ecosystems are damaged, restoration becomes vastly more difficult and expensive than prevention. We have a responsibility to act now to preserve these resources not just for ourselves, but for future generations.

**What role can the Ag Reserve play in helping our County address Climate Change? Do you have plans to bolster the county's funds to address climate change, i.e. expanded grant making, review of energy tax structure for high energy consumers such as data centers?**

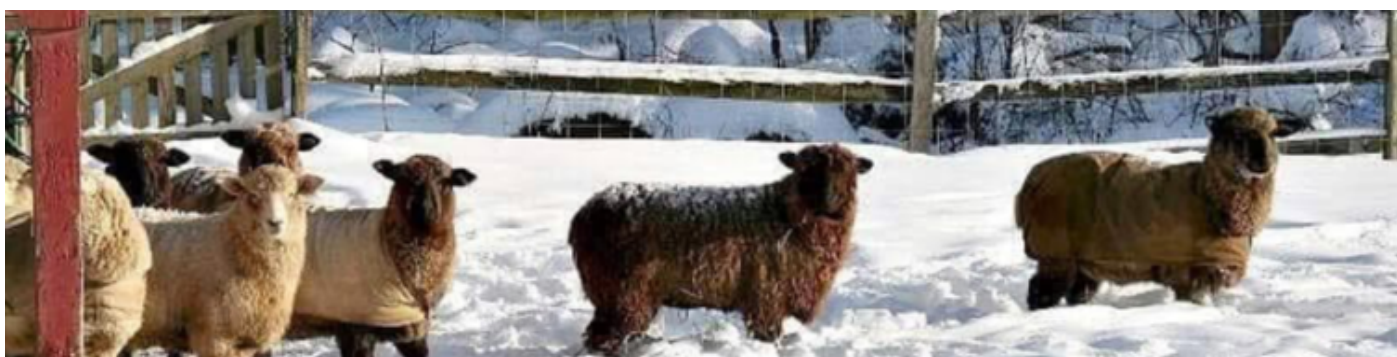
The Agricultural Reserve is one of Montgomery County's greatest environmental achievements and should be viewed as critical climate infrastructure. The Reserve helps absorb carbon, protect biodiversity, preserve forests and wetlands, support groundwater recharge, strengthen regional food security, and prevent the kind of unchecked sprawl that dramatically increases emissions and environmental degradation over time.

But preserving the Ag Reserve alone is not enough – we must ensure it remains economically viable for farmers and environmentally resilient for future generations. I support expanded grant programs and technical assistance for regenerative agriculture, soil conservation, stream restoration, rotational grazing, reforestation, renewable energy compatibility where appropriate, and other sustainable farming practices that help reduce emissions while protecting water quality and open space.

I also believe Montgomery County should reevaluate whether our current tax and infrastructure policies adequately account for the disproportionate environmental and energy burdens created by extremely high-consumption industries. If hyperscale data centers or similar facilities are approved in the future, they should contribute proportionally toward the energy, water, grid modernization, climate mitigation, and infrastructure costs they impose on the public.

More broadly, I believe climate funding should prioritize projects that simultaneously strengthen environmental resilience, public health, local food systems, and long-term sustainability. Investments in watershed restoration, forest protection, green infrastructure, agricultural preservation, and clean energy transition should not be viewed as competing priorities – they are interconnected parts of building a more resilient Montgomery County.

Finally, climate policy must be rooted in democratic legitimacy and public trust. Communities most affected by environmental decisions – including rural residents and Agricultural Reserve communities – deserve a meaningful voice in shaping the County's long-term climate and land use policies.



**Do you support the long planned closure of the trash incinerator in Dickerson? Please provide some details as to why or why not. (pictured above: Shepherd's hey Farm)**

Yes – I support the long-planned closure of the Dickerson incinerator and a transition toward a more sustainable and modern waste management strategy for Montgomery County.

The incinerator was built during a different era of environmental policy and waste management thinking. Today, we know far more about the public health, environmental, and climate implications associated with incineration, particularly for surrounding communities and regional air quality. I believe Montgomery County should be moving toward a long-term strategy centered on waste reduction, reuse, composting, recycling modernization, and circular economy principles rather than continued dependence on large-scale incineration.

At the same time, this transition must be handled responsibly and honestly. The County cannot simply close the facility without a serious implementation plan for managing waste streams, protecting workers, and preventing the outsourcing of environmental burdens to other jurisdictions. We need a realistic transition strategy that includes expanded composting infrastructure, stronger recycling systems, public education, and regional coordination.

I also believe Dickerson and Agricultural Reserve residents deserve meaningful involvement in decisions that affect their environment and quality of life. Too often, communities that host major infrastructure bear disproportionate environmental burdens while having too little influence over the policymaking process.

More broadly, Montgomery County should approach environmental policy through the lens of long-term sustainability, public health, and intergenerational responsibility. Climate resilience requires us to modernize outdated infrastructure while ensuring that the costs and burdens of those transitions are shared fairly and transparently.

**Should Montgomery County host hyperscale Data Centers? If so, what zoning standards and regulations should be established? Have we gathered all the necessary information to make an informed decision at this time?**

No. At this time, I do not believe Montgomery County should host hyperscale data centers.

These facilities raise serious concerns regarding energy consumption, water usage, grid capacity, noise, land use compatibility, transmission infrastructure, public costs, and long-term environmental impact. Montgomery County should not rush into a major new land use category with potentially enormous climate and infrastructure consequences without full public understanding, independent analysis, and strong safeguards.

I have already made clear in my response to CCAN that I will not support data centers that are not paired with fully clean energy solutions. I would also require rigorous standards for water conservation, stormwater management, grid impact mitigation, noise control, emergency preparedness, and environmental accountability.

Most importantly, I do not believe we have gathered all the necessary information to make an informed decision at this time. Until we have transparent, independent, cumulative-impact analysis – especially on water, energy, climate, infrastructure, and the Agricultural Reserve – Montgomery County should not move forward with hyperscale data center development.



**Forests are a key tool for climate protection and protecting public health. How would forest protection and control of non-native plant species factor into your administration's goals? (Picture above - Wib Middleton)**

Forest protection would be a central part of my administration's environmental and public health priorities. Forests are not simply aesthetic amenities — they are essential infrastructure that protects water quality, absorbs carbon, reduces flooding and heat island effects, supports biodiversity, and improves both physical and mental health outcomes for residents.

I lived for 18 years next to the Muddy Branch and across from the Blockhouse Point Conservation Area. During COVID and throughout much of my adult life, I spent countless hours walking through our county's forest preserves and along the C&O Canal reflecting on life, family, and community. In many ways, these natural spaces became places of healing and perspective during difficult times. One of the reasons my family chose to remain in Montgomery County — even as many friends and loved ones left — was because of the calming and therapeutic effect that nature has had on the health and well-being of my special needs siblings.

My environmental advocacy through the T.A.M.E. Coalition and the Save Ten Mile Creek Coalition reinforced for me how interconnected forests, watersheds, groundwater protection, and climate resilience truly are. Once mature forests and sensitive ecosystems are fragmented or destroyed, the environmental consequences can last for generations.

I support stronger protections against unnecessary deforestation, expansion of stream buffers and tree canopy goals, and more aggressive preservation of ecologically sensitive areas — particularly around watersheds, aquifer recharge zones, and the Agricultural Reserve. I also believe Montgomery County should continue strengthening forest mitigation requirements so that replacement efforts are meaningful, ecologically sound, and locally effective rather than simply symbolic.

Control of invasive and non-native plant species must also become a larger priority. Invasive species can devastate native ecosystems, weaken forest health, reduce biodiversity, and undermine long-term climate resilience. I support increased investment in invasive species management, ecological restoration, public education, and partnerships with conservation groups, farmers, and local communities to protect native habitats.

Protecting forests today is an investment in public health, climate resilience, water security, and quality of life for future generations.

**Where do you stand on synthetic turf playing fields for school and community use?**

I do not support the use of synthetic playing fields for school and community use.



**Challenges to current and future farmers are increasing. The average age of County producers is 59. The cost of leasing farm acreage (60% of farms are leasing) is skyrocketing while a diverse new crop of farmers struggle to afford farmland. Have you got any plans for how the County can help keep the industry healthy and promote expansion– with an understanding that resilience depends on local food and fiber production? (Pictured above: Afrithrive Farm)**

Yes. If Montgomery County wants the Agricultural Reserve to survive long-term, we must make farming economically viable for the next generation. Preserving farmland means very little if farmers themselves can no longer afford to access or work the land.

I strongly support expanding Montgomery Countryside Alliance's Land Link and land leasing efforts and believe the County should help provide stable funding and institutional support for programs that connect new and emerging farmers with available farmland. The County should actively partner with organizations like MCA to help reduce barriers to entry for younger farmers, immigrant farmers, first-generation producers, and small-scale agricultural entrepreneurs who are trying to establish themselves in an increasingly expensive region.

I also believe Montgomery County should explore incentives for properties outside the Agricultural Reserve to voluntarily enter agricultural covenants or be rezoned for long-term rural and farming use where appropriate. As development pressures intensify, we should be looking for creative ways to preserve and expand viable agricultural land, strengthen local food systems, and prevent further fragmentation of open space.

More broadly, I support policies that help farmers remain economically sustainable, including infrastructure assistance, streamlined permitting where appropriate, local procurement initiatives, expanded technical assistance, regenerative agriculture grants, and programs that strengthen local food distribution networks. Climate resilience and food security are deeply interconnected, and Montgomery County should view local agriculture as a strategic long-term asset rather than simply a remnant of the past.

I also believe younger generations are increasingly interested in local food production, sustainability, conservation, and land stewardship. If we create pathways for them to actually access land and build economically viable operations, agriculture can have a strong future in Montgomery County.