

Montgomery County 2026 Candidate Questionnaire



Personal Information:

Name

Jim McNulty

What Office Are You Seeking in the 2026 Election?

Montgomery County Council At-Larg

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

<https://jimmcnulty.org>



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:

As a sitting Gaithersburg city council member, I've dealt with complex zoning, housing, permitting and redevelopment issues, and have both a track record of balancing budgets without raising taxes, and specific plans on how we can move our County forward. I've also lived and worked all over the County—from Silver Spring to Germantown—so I understand the unique needs of our diverse communities and can represent the entire County (I'm the only challenger in this race who lives in the Upcounty and I understand what works in Chevy Chase may not work in Poolesville). Since surviving the 2010 attempted suicide bombing at Discovery in Silver Spring, I've made it my purpose to give back to my community, founding a PTSD peer support group, teaching our kids as a youth baseball coach, helping our seniors as a Meals on Wheels volunteer, serving my neighborhood as an HOA president, and now in my second term on the Gaithersburg City Council.

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?

Montgomery County has a transparency problem – in both its legislative process and its land use decisions. We just saw it play out in real time with this year's county budget: Councilmember Dawn Luedtke publicly called out that the county's transparent process was "replaced by indecision, behind-closed-doors deal-making and major last-minute changes" – on a \$7.9 billion spending plan that balloons the structural deficit to nearly \$300 million. When that's how the county handles its most consequential annual decision, it's hard to tell residents with a straight face that their voices matter.

The land use side is no better. Too often, residents in the Ag Reserve and upcounty learn about zoning text amendments, master plan changes, or development proposals after the real decisions have already been made – and the "public comment" period feels like theater. I'd grade the county's current public engagement a C-minus at best. The process is designed for insiders who already know how to navigate Planning Board agendas, parse zoning text, and show up at 1:30 p.m. on a Tuesday. That's not engagement; that's a filter.

On the Gaithersburg City Council, I do it differently. I read and listen to every piece of testimony submitted on every project – every resident, every business owner, every neighbor. When we undertook "Retool Gaithersburg," our comprehensive zoning overhaul, we went to the community before we wrote the code, not after. We held sessions where people actually live, we explained what was being proposed in plain language, and we built the input into the final product. That's what produced the lowest property tax rate of any large Maryland city alongside nationally recognized redevelopment – broad buy-in, not backroom deals.

On the Office of the People's Counsel: I understand the frustration that drives the call to restore it – residents feel outgunned by developers with deep-pocketed legal teams, and that's a real problem. But I don't believe the answer is standing up an adversarial legal office that litigates against our own county planning staff. You shouldn't need a separate office of attorneys to make sure your councilmember is listening to you – if you do, the problem isn't the lack of a lawyer, it's the lack of leadership. The better investment is making the planning and permitting process itself easier to navigate – plain-language notifications, earlier community engagement before staff recommendations are locked in, evening and weekend sessions in upcounty and rural communities, and a planning department that treats public participation as part of its core mission rather than a box to check. I'd also support a community zoning and land use resource function that provides technical assistance to residents so they can engage effectively without needing to hire an attorney.

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?

On the Gaithersburg City Council, the mayor, council, and planning commission work collaboratively rather than in opposition. That's what functional intergovernmental coordination looks like – and it's the approach I'll bring to the County Council. In Gaithersburg, we've built working relationships with county, state, and federal officials that have produced real results – moving the Lakeforest Mall redevelopment forward, creating an environment where innovative companies continue to add hundreds of new jobs, and passing a comprehensive zoning overhaul with broad community buy-in. None of that happened through press releases. It happened through phone calls, showing up, and doing the unglamorous work of building consensus across jurisdictions and levels of government. Too often, the County Council has been performative when it should be doing the core job of governing better – and residents across this county, especially upcounty, can feel the difference.

I'm the only at-large challenger who lives upcounty, and I bring a perspective that's been missing from these conversations. On critical issues like housing, transportation, and protecting the Ag Reserve, our elected leaders at the county, state, and federal levels are too often working at cross purposes – or not talking to each other at all. Local and county officials approve new developments, but state and federal officials control the transportation funding to support them, and they often fail to act. That's how the Purple Line takes 30 years. That's how Whites Ferry stays closed for five years. We have robust regional coordination structures like the Council of Governments and the Transportation Planning Board already in place, but our current county leadership has too often used them to block progress rather than find solutions.

This election gives us a unique opportunity to elect at least five new Council members who are focused on collaboration and results rather than ideology and turf. If elected, I'll leverage the relationships I've built over years of service – with state legislators like Delegate Ryan Spiegel and Senate Majority Leader Nancy King, with mayors and councilmembers across the county, and with federal and regional partners – to break down those silos and start delivering. Montgomery County doesn't need more politicians talking past each other. It needs people who know how to get in a room, find common ground, and do the work.



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?

Groundwater protection starts with the everyday decisions local governments make – not just the big zoning fights. In Gaithersburg, we've curbed our road salt use in favor of a beet juice brine to protect waterways like Muddy Branch from the chloride contamination that conventional salting causes. That's the kind of practical, unglamorous environmental work that actually moves the needle, and it's the approach I'd push the county to adopt more broadly. At the county level, I will push for increased funding for well water testing programs, stricter stormwater management standards in the Rural Policy Area, and addressing legacy septic systems that threaten groundwater quality.

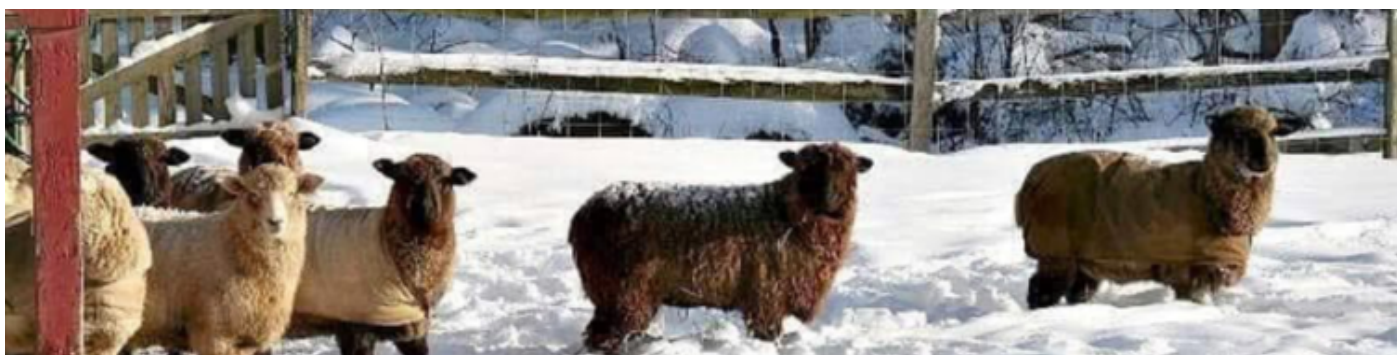
The Potomac is drinking water for over five million people, and we are not treating it with the urgency that demands. I support strengthening the county's role in the Interstate Commission on the Potomac River Basin, investing in upstream riparian buffers – many of which are on Ag Reserve land – and ensuring that any new water withdrawal permits, including for data centers, undergo rigorous cumulative impact analysis, not just project-by-project review.

Planning for a water-constrained future means getting serious about how large-scale users impact our supply. Data centers can be enormous water consumers, and the county needs to complete a comprehensive water demand study that accounts for climate projections, drought scenarios, agricultural needs, and residential growth – so that every approval decision is based on real data, not assumptions. I would prefer closed-loop cooling systems as the standard for any new data center – and for any facility using open-loop cooling, I would require that water exiting the system be discharged at the same temperature at which it was taken in, so we're not degrading aquatic ecosystems with thermal pollution. Beyond data centers, I would prioritize investments in water reuse infrastructure, conservation incentives for agricultural operations, and regional coordination with WSSC and neighboring jurisdictions on long-term supply planning.

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 Ag Reserve is one of the most significant climate assets in the entire Washington region – 93,000 acres of working farmland, forest, and open space that sequesters carbon, manages stormwater naturally, reduces urban heat island effects, and provides local food production that cuts transportation emissions. But I want to be clear about something: the Ag Reserve's climate value comes from the fact that it is a

working agricultural landscape, not a park. If we treat it as green space to be preserved under glass, we lose the farmers — and if we lose the farmers, we lose the climate benefits. Protecting the Ag Reserve means preserving a way of life, so that the next generation of producers can afford to farm here, raise their families here, and continue the stewardship that makes these climate benefits possible in the first place. That's why I support expanding county grant programs for farmers who adopt regenerative practices — cover cropping, no-till farming, rotational grazing for livestock and dairy operations, and pollinator habitat restoration. These are climate investments with immediate co-benefits for soil health, water quality, and the viability of crop, meat, and dairy producers alike. They also keep farming economically sustainable, which is the only way the Ag Reserve's climate role endures over the long term. On energy taxation, I believe high-energy consumers like data centers should pay their fair share of the infrastructure and environmental costs they impose. I support reviewing the county's energy tax structure to ensure that hyperscale facilities are not receiving preferential treatment or shifting costs onto residential and small business ratepayers. If data centers want to locate in Montgomery County, they should be required to procure 100% renewable energy and contribute to a climate resilience fund — not draw down the grid and the water supply while everyone else picks up the tab.



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)

I support the planned closure of the Dickerson incinerator. The facility has been a disproportionate burden on the upcounty community for decades — the air quality, truck traffic, and environmental justice concerns are well-documented, and the residents near Dickerson have borne costs that benefit the entire county. That said, closure without a credible transition plan is just kicking the can down the road. We need honest answers to two questions that don't get enough attention. First, what happens to the waste? We cannot shut down Dickerson and simply put hundreds of trucks on upcounty roads hauling trash somewhere else. The county needs a waste management strategy that maximizes composting, recycling, and waste reduction — and that makes better use of existing rail infrastructure to move what remains, rather than routing more diesel trucks through rural communities. Second, what happens to the energy? Dickerson generates electricity, and Montgomery County already imports roughly 40% of its power. Closing the facility without a plan to replace that generation capacity will make an already tight energy situation worse. We need to pair closure with real investment in local renewable energy and grid capacity so we're not trading one problem for another.

I also believe the county owes the Dickerson community a meaningful conversation about environmental remediation and future land use for the site — one that prioritizes the interests of the people who have lived next to that facility, not developers looking for their next opportunity.

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?

We need to learn from Loudoun County—both the good and the bad—on data centers. Data centers are a genuine economic development opportunity — they generate significant tax revenue and can strengthen our commercial tax base in ways that relieve pressure on homeowners. But they come with real costs: energy demand, infrastructure strain, and potential impacts to residential quality of life. Montgomery County needs to approach this strategically, not reactively. That means developing a clear, transparent regulatory framework that welcomes data centers in the right locations while establishing firm standards for power sourcing, grid investment, noise mitigation, and community impact. We should be open for business — but on terms that actually work for residents. The current proposal is a real-world test case to

see where we might need additional regulation and would answer any of the questions a pause would seek to find out.



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)

Forests play a critical role in climate protection, water quality, and public health – and maintaining a healthy tree canopy should be a priority across the county. Gaithersburg is a Tree City USA community, and I'm proud of the work we've done to protect and expand our urban canopy. I'd bring that same commitment to the county level.

On forest conservation, I support ensuring that mitigation fees under the Forest Conservation Law reflect the true replacement cost of mature forest, so that when fee-in-lieu payments are used, they're actually generating enough resources to plant and maintain meaningful replacement canopy. I'd also advocate for expanding the county's tree canopy goals into upcounty communities, where tree cover is critical for aquifer recharge and stream health.

On invasive species, the county needs a coordinated strategy that goes beyond occasional volunteer cleanups. I would push for dedicated annual funding within the Department of Environmental Protection for invasive species management on county-owned land and in stream valley parks, with a priority on protecting native plant communities and the ecological integrity of the Ag Reserve's forested stream buffers. Partnerships with the University of Maryland Extension and local conservation organizations can stretch those dollars further.

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

In Gaithersburg, we've already addressed this. Our synthetic turf field at Kelley Park uses an eco-friendly organic infill made from engineered wood particles – not the crumb rubber that raises health and environmental concerns. It allows our children to play sports year-round on a safe, durable surface, and it's shared between city programming, Harriet Tubman Elementary School, and community rentals. It works, and our families love it.

The key is getting the materials right. I would not support installing synthetic turf fields that use crumb rubber infill or PFAS-containing materials at schools or community parks. But natural infill systems like what we have in Gaithersburg eliminate those concerns and give kids a playing surface that holds up in all weather and all seasons. The county should also ensure proper stormwater management for any synthetic installation and conduct lifecycle cost analyses that account for eventual replacement and disposal. Done right, synthetic turf with natural infill is a smart investment in our kids and our communities.



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)

The Ag Reserve only works if farming works – and right now, the economics are brutal. When 60% of farm operations are leasing land and the average producer is 59 years old, we are looking at a generational cliff that no amount of scenic preservation will fix if we don't act.

The most important thing the county can do for farmers is stop making it harder and more expensive to farm here. That starts with affordability – growing our economy and our tax base so we aren't raising taxes and adding costs on the people who are already doing the most to steward this land. It also means streamlining the county's permitting process so that a farmer who wants to build a cold storage facility, add a value-added processing operation, or put up a farm stand isn't buried in months of bureaucratic review. I've seen what efficient permitting looks like in Gaithersburg, and the county's process is far more burdensome than it needs to be.

I'm a strong supporter of agrotourism and the kinds of diversified activities that help farm families sustain their way of life – farm-to-table events, on-farm education, pick-your-own operations, farm breweries and wineries, and seasonal activities that bring county residents out to the Reserve and put money directly in producers' pockets. The county should be making it easier to do these things, not harder. I'd also push for expanding local food system infrastructure – aggregation hubs, farmers market growth, and farm-to-institution procurement policies – so that Ag Reserve producers have reliable, profitable markets close to home.

The county also needs to get serious about farmland access for the next generation. When the average producer is 59 and land costs are what they are in Montgomery County, we need creative approaches to connect retiring landowners with beginning farmers at affordable lease rates. And I want to recognize the incredible diversity of that next generation – the immigrant and first-generation farmers who are bringing new crops, new techniques, and new energy to the Ag Reserve. The county's agricultural programs need to be accessible, multilingual, and designed to serve all of these producers, not just legacy operations.

Resilience depends on local food and fiber production, and that depends on making farming a way of life people can actually afford.