

Montgomery County 2026 Candidate Questionnaire



Personal Information:

Name

Jud Ashman

What Office Are You Seeking in the 2026 Election?

County Council, District 3

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

www.VoteJud.com



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 the Mayor of Gaithersburg, where I've spent nearly two decades focused on building a community that is welcoming, fiscally responsible, and forward-looking.

I'm also the founder and chair of the Gaithersburg Book Festival, which reflects my belief that strong communities are built not just through infrastructure and budgets, but through culture, education, and human connection.

Outside of public service, I'm a husband, father, grandfather, and longtime small business owner who believes local government works best when leaders stay accessible, practical, and grounded in the everyday concerns of the people they serve.

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 can improve transparency by making major legislative and land use decisions easier to understand earlier in the process, before residents feel like the outcome is already baked in. That means plain-language summaries, clearer timelines, better notice to affected communities, more accessible public meetings, and proactive outreach through civic associations, nonprofits, and trusted community partners.

I would grade the county's current public engagement as mixed. There are many opportunities for public input, but too often residents only learn about an issue when it is already far along, highly technical, or politically difficult to change. Good engagement is not just holding a hearing; it is making sure people understand what is being proposed, how it affects them, and when their input can actually shape the result.

I am open to re-establishing the Office of the People's Counsel, because residents deserve an independent voice when navigating complex land use and zoning matters. At the same time, I would want to better understand how the office would function in practice, including its scope, costs, staffing, and how it would interact with the Planning Board, County Council, and affected communities.

My goal would not be to create another layer of bureaucracy or automatically oppose development. Montgomery County needs more housing, redevelopment, and economic growth. But we also need a process that residents trust. If structured properly, a People's Counsel could help improve transparency, ensure residents have access to information and expertise, and build greater public confidence that decisions are being made fairly and openly.

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. I think one of the frustrations residents often feel is that different parts of government sometimes appear siloed, reactive, or even working at cross purposes. The County Executive, County Council, Planning Board, municipalities, state agencies, and boards all have different responsibilities, but residents understandably expect a more coordinated and understandable process.

One improvement would be earlier collaboration before major proposals become public flashpoints. Too often, agencies work independently for months and then present communities with a nearly finished product, leaving residents feeling unheard and decision-makers boxed into defending positions rather than solving problems together. Earlier coordination between agencies, municipalities, infrastructure providers, and community stakeholders could lead to better outcomes and fewer conflicts.

I also believe Montgomery County needs stronger partnerships with its municipalities and with the State of Maryland. Cities like Gaithersburg are often on the front lines of housing, transportation, public safety, and economic development, yet too many decisions are still made in a top-down fashion. As someone who has spent years working collaboratively across levels of government, I would focus on relationship-building, transparency, and regular communication so that disagreements can be addressed earlier and public trust strengthened.



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 source water has to be treated as core infrastructure, not just an environmental issue. For rural residents, farms, and businesses that rely on private wells and the Piedmont Sole Source Aquifer, I would support stronger groundwater monitoring, better mapping of recharge areas, careful review of development or industrial uses that could affect groundwater, and expanded support for well testing, septic maintenance, and conservation practices. The aquifer is especially vulnerable because water moves through fractured rock, which can allow contamination to spread in ways that are difficult to predict or reverse.

For the Potomac River, I would prioritize regional planning, conservation, stormwater management, forest and stream-valley protection, and strong coordination with WSSC Water, ICPRB, and neighboring jurisdictions. The Potomac serves millions of people, and recent regional studies show that while supply is likely adequate in most years, extreme drought conditions could create shortages as early as 2030, with risk increasing by 2050.

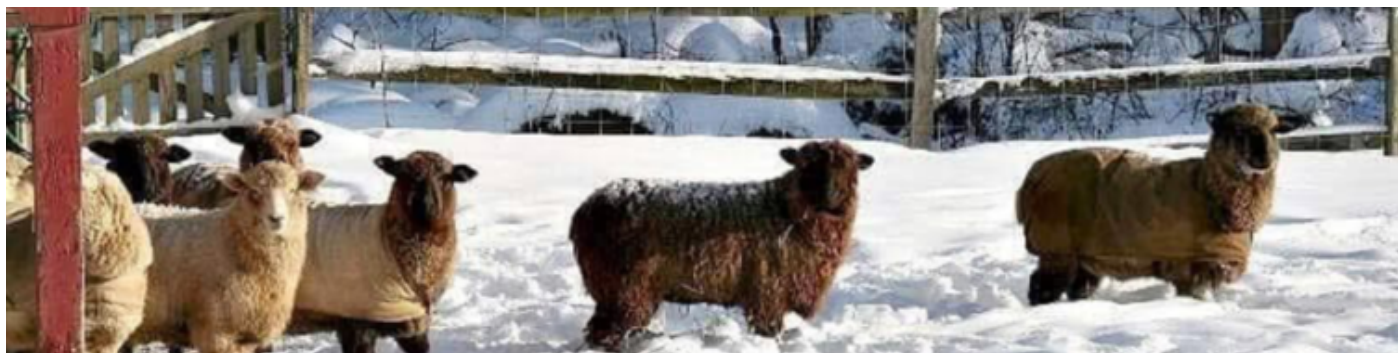
As data centers and other large water users are considered, Montgomery County should require transparent water-demand analysis before approvals, examine cumulative impacts, and prioritize technologies and policies that reduce consumptive water use. In a water-constrained future, we need to plan before we are in crisis: protect recharge areas, reduce waste, invest in resilient infrastructure, incentivize reuse and efficiency, and make sure growth decisions are aligned with long-term water availability.

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 can and should play a major role in Montgomery County's climate strategy. Preserving farmland, forests, and open space is not only important for agriculture and rural character, but also for carbon sequestration, groundwater recharge, flood mitigation, biodiversity, and protection of our drinking water supply. Working farms are part of the environmental solution, and I believe the County should continue supporting conservation easements, regenerative agriculture practices, stream buffering, and incentives that help farmers remain economically viable while advancing environmental goals.

I also believe we need to be realistic about how we fund climate initiatives. Montgomery County residents are already under significant financial pressure, so I would prefer approaches that grow the economy and align costs with impact rather than relying solely on broad tax increases. I am open to reviewing the county's energy tax structure, particularly as it relates to exceptionally high-energy users such as large data centers, provided any approach is carefully structured, regionally competitive, and legally sound.

At the same time, I think we should pursue more state and federal partnerships, public-private investment, and targeted grant opportunities to expand climate resilience work. Priorities for me would include energy efficiency, grid reliability, clean energy generation in Maryland, stormwater improvements, tree canopy protection, and helping residents and businesses lower long-term energy costs through practical, scalable solutions.



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 County Council's decision to defer action on the Dickerson incinerator in the short term because I believe we need more thorough analysis of the available options before making a decision with such major environmental, financial, and operational implications.

The concerns surrounding the facility are real. Residents have legitimate questions about emissions, public health, environmental impacts, and the long-term sustainability of relying on incineration as part of our waste strategy. At the same time, waste disposal is an essential public service, and simply shutting down the facility without a clear and viable alternative could create significant unintended consequences, including higher costs, increased truck traffic, or greater dependence on distant landfills.

Before making a final decision, I would want to see a robust evaluation of alternatives, including expanded recycling and composting, waste reduction strategies, emerging technologies, regional partnerships, environmental impacts, long-term costs, and system reliability. I think residents deserve a transparent process that carefully weighs both the environmental goals and the practical realities of managing the county's waste stream responsibly.

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?

I do not believe Montgomery County has gathered all the necessary information to make a fully informed decision on hyperscale data centers at this time. These facilities can bring economic development and tax base benefits, but they also raise serious questions about energy demand, water use, noise, transmission infrastructure, environmental impacts, and compatibility with surrounding communities, especially in rural or agricultural areas.

The County Council is currently considering a zoning text amendment intended to establish standards for where and how data centers could operate, and I am watching that process carefully. I think that effort is important because Montgomery County should not move forward without a clear regulatory framework in place. Any standards should include careful siting requirements, noise mitigation, setbacks and screening, stormwater protections, water-use analysis, energy-demand review, and transparency around infrastructure impacts and costs.

My position is not an automatic yes or no. It is that any decision should be deliberate, data-driven, and tied to the county's long-term infrastructure, environmental, and economic goals. Before approving hyperscale facilities, I want confidence that we understand the cumulative impacts on the electric grid, water supply, surrounding communities, and our climate commitments, and that appropriate safeguards are firmly in place.



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 should be a central part of Montgomery County's environmental and public health strategy. Forests improve air and water quality, reduce flooding and heat-island effects, protect biodiversity, absorb carbon, and contribute significantly to residents' quality of life. As we continue to grow, I believe we have to be intentional about preserving and expanding tree canopy, protecting stream buffers, and safeguarding sensitive environmental areas, especially in places where development pressure is greatest.

In Gaithersburg, we have implemented strong reforestation requirements as part of our development and environmental review processes, because growth and environmental stewardship must go hand in hand. I believe that same mindset should guide the county's broader approach: when impacts occur, we should mitigate them responsibly and thoughtfully.

I also think we need to take invasive and non-native plant species more seriously. Invasive species can overwhelm native ecosystems, weaken forests, increase erosion, and reduce habitat value even when overall tree canopy numbers appear stable on paper. Protecting forests is not just about planting trees; it is about maintaining healthy ecosystems over time.

My approach would include supporting strong forest conservation policies, expanded reforestation and maintenance efforts, better management of invasive species on public lands, and partnerships with residents, farmers, municipalities, nonprofits, and environmental groups. I also think the County should continue investing in education and incentive programs that help property owners replace invasive plants with native species that are better for pollinators, waterways, and long-term ecosystem health.

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

I think synthetic turf is an issue where reasonable people can disagree, because there are legitimate concerns on both sides. On one hand, synthetic fields can dramatically increase playing capacity, reduce cancellations, withstand heavy use, and help meet the growing demand for youth sports and recreational space in a densely populated county. On the other hand, residents have raised valid concerns about heat, runoff, PFAS and other material safety questions, environmental impacts, and long-term replacement costs.

My approach would be pragmatic rather than ideological. I do not think every field should automatically become synthetic turf, nor do I think the county should categorically prohibit it. Decisions should be based on site-specific analysis, intended use, environmental impacts, maintenance realities, and community input.

In Gaithersburg, we currently have three synthetic turf fields that utilize organic infill rather than traditional crumb rubber, and they have operated very successfully over time. That experience has shown me that newer technologies and materials can help address some of the concerns people have raised while still providing the recreational benefits that communities need.

I also think Montgomery County should continue investing in high-quality natural grass fields where

feasible, especially as turf-management technology improves. In some locations, enhanced natural grass may be the better long-term solution. In others, synthetic turf may make sense because of the intensity of use or space limitations.



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)

I think the County should focus on three major goals: protecting farmland, improving economic viability, and supporting the next generation of producers. That can include expanding agricultural preservation efforts, improving access to long-term leases, supporting farm-transition planning, encouraging local food purchasing, streamlining regulations where appropriate, and strengthening partnerships with agricultural organizations, educational institutions, and regional markets.

I also think we should do more to support beginning farmers and diverse agricultural entrepreneurs who may not have generational access to land or capital. The Agricultural Reserve will only remain strong if new producers can realistically enter the field. Exploring tools like shared infrastructure, incubator programs, technical assistance, and innovative financing partnerships could help reduce barriers to entry.

More broadly, I believe local food and fiber production are increasingly important to resilience, environmental stewardship, and economic diversity. The pandemic reminded us how fragile supply chains can be. Maintaining a healthy agricultural sector in Montgomery County is not just about preserving history or open space - it is about strengthening our long-term sustainability and self-reliance as a community.