

Montgomery County 2026 Candidate Questionnaire



Personal Information:

Name

Karla Silvestre

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?

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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 consise.

(pictured above: One Acre Farm)

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

I'm a proud Montgomery County resident, working mom, and immigrant who came to America after my family fled political persecution in Guatemala at age eight—a journey that shaped my belief in opportunity, education, and public service. For more than two decades, I've worked in community engagement, from county government and the Gilchrist Immigrant Resource Center to Montgomery College, helping connect residents to education, workforce pathways, and essential services. I've also raised my two daughters in Montgomery County, served eight years on the Board of Education, and remain deeply committed to protecting the same opportunities that helped my family thrive.

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?

Transparency and public trust are essential to good government, and throughout my career I have focused

on helping residents better understand and navigate public systems. In the County's Office of Community Partnerships, as Director of the Gilchrist Immigrant Resource Center, and now through my work at Montgomery College, I have spent years connecting communities to government, services, and decision-making processes that can often feel inaccessible or overwhelming.

That experience has shown me that Montgomery County must do better by making information easier to access, engaging residents earlier, and clearly demonstrating how public input shapes legislative and land use decisions. Transparency is not just about posting information—it's about ensuring residents actually understand what is happening and have a meaningful voice before decisions are made.

I believe current public engagement is uneven. While there are opportunities to participate, too many residents feel the process is difficult to navigate or that engagement happens too late. We need earlier outreach, stronger language access, plain-language communication, and more accountability.

I am open to re-establishing the Office of the People's Counsel if it strengthens independent oversight and gives residents a stronger voice. My approach has always been about building trust, improving access, and making government more responsive to the people it serves.

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 do believe coordination between the executive branch, County Council, Planning Board, and state partners can be improved. In my experience working in Montgomery County government, the school system, and community-facing roles, I've seen how fragmentation and unclear communication can slow down decisions and make it harder for residents to understand how government works.

Based on that experience, I would focus on three improvements:

First, earlier alignment across branches. Too often, planning, budgeting, and policy decisions move on separate tracks. Bringing agencies together earlier in the process would reduce delays and improve consistency.

Second, clearer communication and shared goals. Whether it's land use, schools, or infrastructure, agencies should be aligned around measurable outcomes so decisions are not made in isolation.

Third, stronger community-centered coordination with the state and local partners. My work in the County's Office of Community Partnerships and at Montgomery College has shown me the importance of breaking down silos so residents aren't left navigating disconnected systems.

Better collaboration doesn't mean less independence—it means more intentional coordination, greater transparency, and ultimately better service delivery for residents.



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 both an environmental responsibility and a public health and economic necessity for Montgomery County. In rural areas of Montgomery County, where residents rely on wells connected to a federally designated Sole Source Aquifer, we must take a proactive approach to protecting groundwater quality. That means strengthening protections against contamination, improving monitoring and enforcement, and ensuring land use decisions in the Agricultural Reserve prioritize long-term water sustainability for farms, residents, and businesses.

For the Potomac River, which serves as a drinking water source for over 5 million people in the region, we need stronger regional coordination and planning. Issues like drought, upstream pollution, and increasing industrial demand—including data centers—require us to think beyond county borders and work collaboratively with state and regional partners.

In terms of policy, I would prioritize: stronger source water protection standards in land use decisions, investment in conservation and water reuse technologies, and better data sharing and forecasting around water demand and supply. We also need to evaluate the cumulative impacts of high-water-use industries to ensure we are not overextending a finite resource.

My approach is grounded in planning ahead, using data, and ensuring that economic development does not outpace environmental sustainability. We must protect our water supply today while planning responsibly for a water-constrained future.

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 in Montgomery County plays a critical role in our climate strategy. It is one of our most important tools for carbon sequestration, stormwater management, and preserving open space that helps absorb flood impacts and reduce heat. Protecting and strengthening the Ag Reserve means protecting one of our most effective natural climate assets.

At the same time, we need to ensure our broader climate strategy is fully funded and forward-looking. I support expanding and stabilizing funding for climate initiatives, including greater investment in grant programs that help residents, farmers, and small businesses adopt clean energy, improve energy efficiency, and build climate resilience.

We also need to take a closer look at our energy tax structure and overall policy framework for high-energy users, including data centers. As demand on our energy grid increases, we must ensure that large-scale users are paying their fair share and that their growth is aligned with our climate and infrastructure goals.

My approach is to combine environmental stewardship with fiscal responsibility—investing in proven climate solutions, protecting natural assets like the Ag Reserve, and ensuring that our policies keep pace with rising energy and environmental demands.



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 Resource Recovery Facility, but it has to be done responsibly and with a clear transition plan.

This facility is over 30 years old and, while it has provided a waste disposal solution for the county, it is also a significant source of pollution and has recently experienced serious emissions violations that raise ongoing concerns about environmental and public health impacts. At the same time, it plays a major role in our current waste system, so we cannot simply shut it down without a viable alternative.

My position is that Montgomery County should move toward closure while accelerating investments in a modern, sustainable waste system—one that prioritizes waste reduction, recycling, composting, and regional landfill partnerships. We also need to fully account for the costs of closure, including transportation, environmental remediation, and system transition planning, so residents are not surprised by unintended impacts.

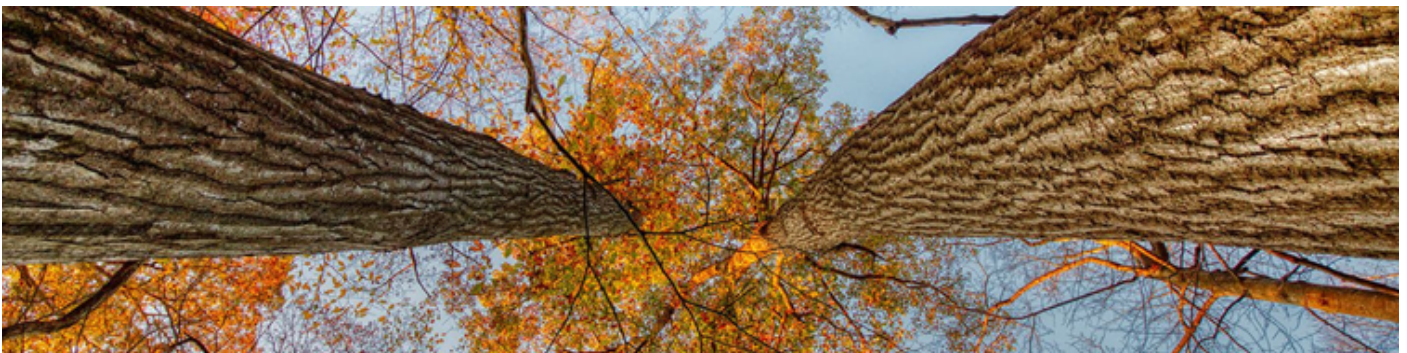
We should also use this moment to strengthen our long-term “zero waste” strategy so we are not dependent on incineration in the future. The goal should be a cleaner, more sustainable system that protects public health while ensuring reliability and affordability for residents.

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 believe Montgomery County should decide first if the benefits outweigh the costs. We are part of a regional system, but we also cannot make decisions that increase costs for residents without fully understanding the tradeoffs.

If the County does consider allowing data centers, I would support strict standards, 100% renewable energy, limits on energy and water consumption, requirements for transparency on environmental impacts, and ensuring that large users pay their fair share of infrastructure costs. Zoning should be carefully structured to prevent conflicts with residential areas and sensitive environmental resources.

My approach is rooted in the same principles I’ve used throughout my public service: make data-driven decisions, prioritize long-term sustainability, and ensure that economic development goes hand-in-hand with residents’ quality of life.



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 core part of my approach to climate resilience, public health, and quality of life in Montgomery County. Our forests are one of our most effective natural tools for absorbing carbon, reducing stormwater runoff, protecting water quality, and providing cooling benefits as temperatures rise.

In my administration, I would prioritize protecting existing forest cover, especially in sensitive areas like stream valleys and rural parts of the County, where tree loss has the greatest environmental impact. I would also support stronger reforestation and tree canopy goals in both urban and suburban communities to ensure all residents benefit from green infrastructure.

Equally important is addressing the spread of invasive non-native plant species, which threaten forest health and biodiversity. I would support expanded monitoring, early intervention, and partnerships with landowners, nonprofits, and environmental experts to manage invasive species more effectively.

My approach is grounded in what I've seen throughout my public service: environmental protection works best when it is proactive, science-based, and collaborative. By protecting forests and managing invasive species, we can strengthen climate resilience, improve public health, and preserve Montgomery County's natural resources for future generations.

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

We should be investing in natural grass fields where feasible, improving maintenance practices, and ensuring that communities have equitable access to quality recreational spaces.

That said, I support a balanced, data-driven approach to the most advanced synthetic turf fields that prioritizes student safety, environmental impacts, and equitable access to athletic space. Synthetic turf fields have helped expand year-round access to sports and recreation, which is important for students and community use—especially as demand for safe, usable fields continues to grow. However, we also need to be honest about concerns related to heat, stormwater runoff, microplastics, and long-term environmental impacts. My approach would be to ensure decisions are made based on the best available science, with strong environmental and health standards in place. That means evaluating materials carefully, requiring proper drainage and environmental safeguards, and considering heat mitigation strategies such as shade, cooling technologies, and scheduling adjustments during extreme temperatures.

In short, I support providing adequate athletic facilities for students and residents, but we must do it responsibly—balancing access with environmental stewardship and public health considerations.



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—I believe protecting and strengthening agriculture in Montgomery County is essential to our

environmental health, local economy, and long-term food security.

The challenges you've raised are real: an aging farming population, rising land costs, and barriers for new and diverse farmers trying to enter the field. In my experience working across county government, education, and community engagement, I've seen that long-term system health requires intentional investment and policy alignment.

First, we need to continue strengthening land preservation tools like the Agricultural Reserve and easement programs so farmland remains available and affordable for future generations of farmers.

Second, I would support targeted programs to help new and beginning farmers—including technical assistance, access to capital, and partnerships with institutions like Montgomery College—to build agricultural skills, business planning capacity, and market access.

Third, we should explore ways to make leasing more stable and affordable, so working farmers can plan long-term without facing constant cost increases or uncertainty.

Finally, local food systems matter. Strengthening farm-to-school programs, farmers markets, and local procurement can help ensure there is reliable demand for County-grown products.

My approach is to keep agriculture viable, economically sustainable, and accessible to the next generation, recognizing that a strong local food system is part of our resilience strategy as a County.