

Montgomery County 2026 Candidate Questionnaire



Personal Information:

Name Kate Stewart

What Office Are You Seeking in the 2026 Election? District 4 Councilmember

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:

Currently, I serve as the District 4 representative on the County Council and I chair the Government Operations and Fiscal Policy and Audit Committees and serve on Transportation and Environment. Before joining the Council I was Mayor in the city of Takoma Park. I have lived in MoCo for over three decades and raised my two children here who went to MCPS.

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 am proud to have supported the efforts of the county's Planning Academy. This free, on demand, online curriculum familiarizes residents with the county's planning process and how to participate in it and correspond with the departments that review development applications in the county. I believe strongly in a land use vision that empowers residents, which is why I spoke at the Planning Academy's first

graduation. I was very impressed with the residents who participated and their feedback about the program. I am continuing to engage with residents and staff around how the program can continue to reach even more residents. The Planning Academy seems to be a more useful tool for residents given the varied scope and scale of land use and development questions across different parts of the county. In addition, the Academy just won an award from the state for advancing a more transparent and community engaged process. So, I would prefer to invest more in this program.

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?

Absolutely, we can always do better. One example of a step in the right direction is the when we established the Infrastructure Funding Workgroup that comes out with recommendations this summer. Its membership includes county transportation, planning, schools, and parks staff. We need much stronger coordination between agencies through communication that reduces duplication in reviews and looks at how we planning for the future and funding our infrastructure needs. Regularly scheduled check ins between state and county partners with specific follow ups tend to be effective at ensuring regular progress on shared concerns. For example, our office does regular check-in with State Highway and our State Delegation to discuss projects and work they are doing.



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?

I would work with our expert natural resources staff and local universities to strategize with our largest volumetric water users (ex: golf courses, hospitals, nursing homes, data centers assuming they are water cooled and built at all) to implement strategies to reduce usage. Just like we need demand response technologies among the biggest electricity users in our county, we need to triage who water restrictions should apply to first in more severe drought scenarios, as other states across the south and west have done for years.

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 a crucial way to support both local ag producers and local produce consumers. We should build on and expand the excellent work of the Office of Food Systems Resiliency which contracts locally to support residents experiencing food insecurity and also conveniently reduces transportation costs and emissions for produce getting to consumers by buying local. We first need to highlight the work of the Green Bank across the entire county and restore its funding to the 10% of the fuel energy tax level prescribed in county law. We also need state enabling legislation to levy new taxes on high energy consumers, and I would support such legislation for hyperscale data centers and other projects with serious infrastructure improvement requirements.



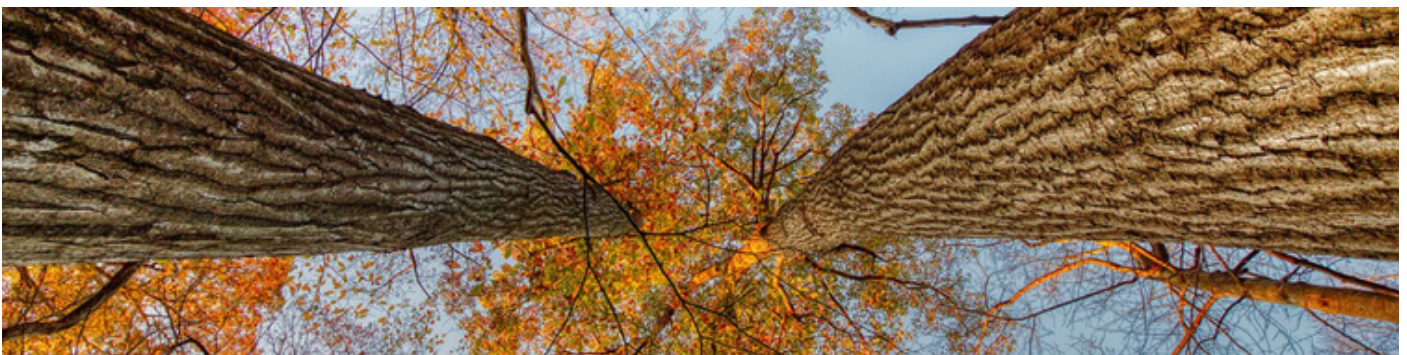
Do you support the long planned closure of the trash incinerator in Dickerson? Please provide some details as to why or why not. (pictured above: Shepherd's hey Farm)

I support closing the incinerator when there is a specific, equitable, and fiscally responsible alternate way for us to dispose of our waste presented to the Council. Despite my convening the first full Council briefing on this topic in years during my Council Presidency last year and getting a great deal more detail from DEP staff on the operation of the incinerator and possible alternatives, a plan meeting those criteria has not been presented to the Council yet. This Executive has had 7.5 years as Executive, even after his 12 years on Council, to present that plan and has so far failed to do so. We look forward to resolving this issue he has failed to.

With residents grappling with increased expenses in their lives due to federal actions and matters beyond the Council's control, we need to make certain that any alternative system we pursue is predictable, reliable, and with stable costs to residents as we fulfill this basic function of local government.

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?

The state has recently defined data centers as 25MW or greater energy usage, which I am using interchangeably with the term "hyperscale." We should not host hyperscale data centers unless they can adhere to BYONCE: Bring Your Own New Clean Energy, incorporate technologies like battery storage and demand response, and/or use a power purchase agreement for renewable energy from elsewhere in the PJM territory. We need to also examine strengthening setback, noise, and utility infrastructure standards so that if additional data centers are constructed in the county, they do not negatively affect adjacent residential uses and infrastructure. We also need clear expectations on water usage, even if that is a subject the state and not the county enforces. I look forward to discussing a few different pieces of legislation on this subject at the Council including on the T&E committee after the annual operating budget. We have gathered a great deal of necessary information, and I think we should continue to discuss it in our legislative process at the Council as the body empowered to make land use policy for the county. If we have any new data centers built, they need to be done correctly and adhere to requirements as those above I enumerated, or they shouldn't be built at all.



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)

We must protect and conserve mature forests already existing in the county, further disincentivize removal

of mature trees, and incentivize incorporating resilient, native plant design into development projects as a major public benefit.

On the Council, I cosponsored efforts to ban planting bamboo in the county, supported raising the “tree fee” and updating our forest canopy laws to disincentivize removal of mature trees and increase the replanting ratio, and expanded the Green Bank’s authority to include resiliency projects. I also have a great deal of experience working on ordinances and regulations preserving our tree canopy from my time as Mayor. We face challenges from invasive species resulting from the climate crisis, and we’re going to have to look at what native species and hybrids are more resilient to climate shocks and encourage use of those wherever possible. The more we invest in this and planning up front, the better we will be able to mitigate extreme heat and flooding risks to our people and crop harms in the ag reserve.

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

I voted against the Council increasing funding to MCPS to continue installation of synthetic turf fields, but was outvoted by colleagues. We do need to look at where we can expand and maintain natural grass fields, and also acknowledge that synthetic turf fields are likely to remain a part of our field inventory in the county and play a relevant role in available playing time for a variety of residents. We have historic inequities in field availability in different geographic areas of the county. I support increasing the number of natural grass fields in our inventory with an organized transition effort that also acknowledges and prioritizes the availability of fields across the county and maintenance required for fields of all types to remain usable and safe.



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 age of producers reflects the increasing average age of county residents overall, which is a symptom of (among other factors) needing to expand housing at all affordability levels elsewhere in the county so producers can live closer to where they work.

I would work with organizations like the FFA, 4-H, and UMD’s extension program and consult with colleagues from around the region drawing on my experience as MWCOC Board Chair to see how to support and create a youth to professional agriculture pipeline. Higher education institutions including Montgomery College and USG could also incorporate farm experience into certain degree programs’ practical or lab credits as one potential on-ramp.