



Montgomery County 2022 Candidate Questionnaire - Kate Stewart

Personal Information:

Name Kate Stewart

What Office Are You Seeking in the 2022 Election? MoCo District 4

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

www.votekatestewart.com

Please Answer the Following Questions- responses will posted in their entirety and will not be edited.

Someone new to Montgomery County may ask, "What's the Ag Reserve and why is it important?" What's your answer?

The Agricultural Reserve covers one third of the County and is almost 100,000 acres of protected farmland in northern Montgomery County. It provides food, livelihoods, employment, as well as hiking, fishing, and other outdoor activities. It provides a wonderful respite in our County while also functioning as a green belt for the larger DC region. The Ag Reserve is a unique and valuable resource not just for county but for the region.

What is your vision for the future of the County's Agricultural Reserve? Briefly, how would you achieve that vision?

The Ag Reserve needs to continue to exist, and we need to ensure we have policies and programs in place to ensure its existence. In particular, I would like to explore how we can better support our local farmers by implementing greater food aggregation, processing and distribution to help get local food products from the farmer to the consumer. For example, aggregation will bring together produce from multiple sources to create a larger and more consistent supply of food locally. Processing helps turn fresh-from-the-farm foods into forms ready for sale or consumption and general requires infrastructure, such as community kitchens. Finally, distribution helps complete the connection to consumers by moving the produce from aggregation, processing or storage to stores, markets or institutions.

To succeed, we need to support the Ag Reserve and invest in distribution models such as Farm to Food Bank, Farm to School, Farm to Hospital and others. One example is the work Manna is doing directly purchasing from 36 local farms for their food market and distribution. We need to expand this work so our local farmers are connected to our institutions whether they are the schools, hospitals, non-profits, or other organizations. There is state funding available for these types of projects. In 2020, Senate Bill 985/House Bill 1488 established the Local Farm Food Aggregation Grant Fund and the Local Farm Enterprise Food Aggregation Grant Program to help grow and strengthen our local food systems and create opportunities for small farmers to sell products to institutional or wholesale buyers.

In addition, I serve as the Vice-Chair of the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments and sit on the Food and Agriculture Regional Member (FARM) Policy Committee. The FARM's purpose is to support development of long-term regional direction and collaboration toward a more resilient, connected food and farm economy (food system) across urban, suburban and rural communities in the

metropolitan Washington region. MoCo's Ag Reserve is very much a unique and wonderful asset for the County and the whole region and I look forward to working with folks in the County as well as regionally to support it.

What are your priorities regarding stewardship of the County's natural resources (water, forests, open spaces) and parkland?

Our natural resources should be protected and maintained– we are the stewards of these resources for the generations to come. Mental health and physical health are improved from being able to enjoy forests, green spaces and parkland while also having clean air and water. The resources need to be able to be enjoyed by all, and race equity must be a factor as we look to how we are protecting our natural resources and who can access them.

What role will you play with regard to ensure that we safeguard our drinking water supply both surface and groundwater?

Drinking water must be safe. Takoma Park led, and Montgomery County followed, in the effort to reduce lawn pesticides. Similarly, best management practices in stormwater filtering help improve our waterways and reduce erosion. To ensure drinking water is safe, there must be regular testing, treatment and review of security measures. In addition, preserving our tree canopy in places around the county is necessary to help the absorption of stormwater and removal of pollutants.

What are your top priorities to help the County address climate change? What role will the Ag Reserve play?

We should focus on the areas that provide the biggest greenhouse gas bang for the dollars, while also ensuring equity benefits, and I believe our focus needs to be on reducing and generating:

- We need to reduce our energy usage and waste. The main sectoral sources of greenhouse gas emissions are buildings and transportation (each accounting for more than 40% of the County's emissions):
 - o Focus on existing buildings: Pass regulations and provide resources for implementing building energy performance standards, focused on multifamily and small commercial buildings to help residents who are most vulnerable; tackle how to move forward faster on electrification requirements and incentives for existing buildings.
 - o Create the infrastructure for zero waste management: Move forward immediately with building our own composting facility(ies) in the County so that we can move beyond the current compost pilot, and upgrade our recycling plant. Both of these actions need to happen quickly so that we can move forward with implementing a plan for zero waste in the County.
 - o Transportation: Support and move faster on public transit projects, including scaling up of Bus Rapid Transit, and focusing on decarbonizing vehicles through programs that make EVs more widely available and affordable. There is considerable need to integrate transportation planning with equity, housing and land use policy; for example, creating a system of FREE EV microtransit and ride sharing facilities connecting to metro, light rail (purple line), BRT and bus lines would help to solve the "last mile problem" so that all residents of the County have access to an integrated system of public transit.
- We need to generate clean energy: We need more concrete plans for more generation of clean energy and increasing the amount of clean sources. Due to advocacy by the County Government, Mayors such as myself, environmental activists and our state delegation, the State has authorized the County to implement a 7-year pilot for Community Choice Energy (which was identified by the CAP as the most important thing that the County can do to cut our carbon emissions), but the Council will need to pass implementing legislation in early 2024 after the Maryland Public Service Commission sets the regulations for CCE (required by December 31, 2023). The County needs to greatly expand its generation of renewable energy, in part to ensure low cost options for clean energy under CCE, and we also need to do more to expand microgrids and community solar. MoCo should be generating more of its own renewable energy with emphasis on generation in the built environment through solar and geothermal generation coupled with battery storage. Generation of renewable energy must be coupled

with support for energy efficiency such as home weatherization, with emphasis on assistance to low and moderate income residents, and the County needs to take advantage of state and federal funds for energy efficiency, as well as for generation of renewable energy.

The County's Climate Change Workgroup had recommendations for actions to be undertaken within the Ag Reserve and reaffirmed the critical role the Ag Reserve plays in addressing climate change in the County. We are in this together and we need to jointly find the ways to meet the challenge of climate change in Montgomery County.

What more can be done to support our local farm businesses and rural communities?

Supporting local farm businesses and rural communities starts by letting people know that farms and rural communities exist in Montgomery County and the essential role they play in our economy and food systems. As noted earlier, we need to invest in programs that create food aggregation, process and distribution to create a more resilient local food system and support our farmers. Serving on the MWCOG's FARM Committee, I look forward to working not just in the County but regionally to support farms and rural communities.

What are your regional transportation priorities? Do you support M83 and an additional Potomac bridge and outer beltway through the Reserve or adjacent rural zones?

My top priorities are these, and all need to be tackled at once:

- Completion of the Purple Line and the bike and pedestrian connections to it
- MARC rail and BRT routes and related improvements, including the bike and pedestrian connections
- Vision Zero projects on identified high-risk and priority road segments and intersections
- Key basic infrastructure improvements (such as bridge work) that would cause major problems if not addressed in a timely way
- Other key bikeways, pedestrian and transit improvements, particularly in Equity Focus Areas

New roads or added lanes are rarely needed. (That is separate from those very limited areas where some road widening may be important - safety improvements at an intersection, for example – or to accommodate the installation of busways and protected bikeways.) I also do not support M-83 the mid-county highway extension through the Ag Reserve. We need to move away from car-centric investments and look at other transportation options.

How should our County manage its solid waste? What role should incineration, composting and recycling play?

I support the County setting a food waste goal and implementation plan to divert more waste and reduce waste generation. The first step is to develop a diverse and distributed food waste reduction infrastructure in Montgomery County.

Within the next two to three years, we should build our own composting facility(ies) to do waste conversion and within 5 years have a county-wide curbside compost program (which we already have in Takoma Park). Twenty percent of our waste stream is food. If we have our own site(s) in MoCo we can also bring down the cost of composting for the county and generate money from tip fees (because others regionally would also probably use the site(s)) and from selling the product.

We also need to work with growers, grocers, restaurateurs and consumers to reduce food waste. As we are creating this infrastructure we need to look at the range of sizes of composting and consider locally based composting solutions, such as onsite composting, community projects, and on-farm composting

In Montgomery County as in many parts of America, we have the paradoxical situation of too many residents who are food insecure and too much food waste. We should be doing more to bring together representatives of food-insecure communities with agricultural producers (especially in the agriculture reserve) and grocers and restaurateurs to find creative solutions. Programs such as Manna's

ChowMatch program should be supported and expanded.

We also need to upgrade and modernize our recycling facility. I saw the need to modernize firsthand when I toured the current facility. It is over capacity, with 40% of everything we get from curb being sent to Pennsylvania because we can't process it and another 40% that is not recyclable. I believe there is currently an RFP that has been released and we need to make sure this project moves forward as quickly as possible.

Regarding the incinerator, the incinerator is problematic and needs to be closed and that should happen as soon as we are able to identify what we will do with the trash and where it will go. This must be done so we are not dumping our trash in communities that have historically been on the receiving end of other people's trash. The County needs to be ready to transition from the incinerator and close it as soon as possible. Overall, neither incinerators nor landfills are good for our communities. As noted above, we need to put in place more and easier recycling and expand the County's compost pilot. The ultimate answers are reducing consumption and implementing manufacturer buy back provisions and other elements of a circular economy.

In addition to closing the incinerator, we need to work to convince the state legislature to remove incineration from the Renewable Portfolio Standard (RPS). Incineration creates electricity, but not clean electricity, and it should not receive credits like solar and wind energy. My experience working with our state legislature will help to make this happen.

What are your views on the general plan update "Thrive 2050," both the process and the draft now before the Council?

In the County we have a housing crisis that necessitates us to take action. We need to build more housing, and at the same time, ensure people are not displaced from their homes and have safe stable places to call home. I serve as the Vice-Chair of the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments Board and I am a strong supporter of the regional targets that MWCOC established and believe we need to do more in the County to implement the targets. There have been many discussions on the County Council regarding Thrive and a number of drafts. I believe the Council is now reviewing and adding additional chapters on stormwater and infrastructure, as well as engaging with a consultant on racial equity considerations. I am supportive of taking action that will help the County move forward with increasing our housing supply but that needs to be done in way that ensures housing is built for a range of income levels and we need to have in place mechanisms to help those who may face displacement.

Do you believe that the way that local government branches, state entities, and the public currently interact can be improved? If so, what steps would you take?

As a mayor of a City, I know firsthand that the way various governmental branches interact with each other can be improved. This is an ongoing process that can always be improved upon.

My efforts to increase collaboration locally have been highly successful and I have been able to forge strong regional connections through my role as the Vice-Chair of the Board of the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments. During my time as Mayor I have worked on numerous issues with the county – from COVID-19 response to helping families displaced by tragedy to finding ways the county and City can work together to solve community problems. For example, at the outset of COVID, I helped set up regular calls between mayors across the country and county public health officials so that we could hear real time what was going on and so they could hear from us directly about the problems and concerns of the community. This type of cooperative approach makes all levels of government work better.

I have also worked frequently with state representatives to shape and pass bills that enabled us to make police reforms and provided funds for business impacted by the Purple Line. Again, by coordinating efforts across local and state entities and working cooperatively to solve problems, we can make government more efficient and more effective at meeting the needs of our residents.

Effective dialog with the public by the various governmental entities can also be improved, usually by meeting with people where they are on matters that affect them. There is no one answer and each situation needs to be approached thoughtfully and at the outset. This can mean going door-to-door to talk to people about their neighborhoods, chatting in apartment building lobbies with residents, interacting with high school students on areas of concern, training representatives of various community sectors on the planning processes so that their role as trusted ambassadors can be leveraged into effective input into decision making. These steps require work by governmental representatives outside of the workday, on weekends, and in various languages and settings.