



Montgomery County 2022 Candidate Questionnaire - Katie Fry Hester

Personal Information:

Name Katie Fry Hester

What Office Are You Seeking in the 2022 Election? State Senate District 9

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.

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

The Ag Reserve is a vibrant and gorgeous part of Montgomery County, including over 90,000 acres which preserves large contiguous areas of land for farming and open space. This incredible area provides locally grown food, generates thousands of jobs and small businesses, and strengthens the overall resiliency of our food supply chains. In addition, the wineries and breweries emerging in the Ag Reserve continue to expand tourism and recreational opportunities.

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

Protecting the Agricultural Reserve is vital to our local economy and helps to preserve green space. By keeping our farms, we all win. I will work with my colleagues on the Budget & Tax Committee to ensure that the Ag Reserve receives the state support it needs so our farms continue to thrive. In addition, I have been working for several years to ensure there is a stable market for our farms by requiring our state institutions to purchase 20% of their food from Maryland Certified Farms. I also voted to support SB594 and establish grant programs for wineries and vineyards in Maryland to continue economic growth in this area.

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

We all deserve clean air, clean water, and safe food. In order to protect our natural resources, I will continue to fight for Montgomery County's fair share of Program Open Space funding, champion solutions that move our community to more efficient and sustainable practices, and find opportunities to create partnerships between the public and private sector that benefit the environment.

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

The Ag Reserve plays an important role in protecting our drinking water supply. Representing a district where the majority of the population utilizes wells makes safe groundwater an important part of my life and my policy decisions. In the FY22 budget I added language that required MDE to conduct a groundwater study on the quality and quantity of our water sources, including private residential wells, community wells, and urban wastewater treatment. Part of this study also requires them to estimate

how many Marylanders may be adversely affected by contamination within these sources. I look forward to reviewing the results of this study once completed, and implementing the recommendations through legislation.

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

Climate change has already impacted Maryland communities, especially those in District 9. We must act urgently to avoid worsening impacts, which is why I established the Office of Resilience within Maryland's Department of Emergency Management to strengthen our ability to prevent and recover from environmental, technological, or manmade hazards. The Ag Reserve already plays an important role in preserving our natural environment, but it can play a larger role by sequestering carbon in soil. To this effect, I secured \$2.5 M in this year's budget for the Healthy Soils Program to promote and provide state funds for farmers to adopt these practices.

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

Agriculture is still Maryland's largest single industry, and I believe our public policy should reflect that. We must implement financial incentives to improve the commercial viability of farming in Maryland, invest in our small farmers, and support value-added ag products such as specialty livestock, gourmet food products, handmade soaps, and flowers by expanding links to urban markets. This year, we expanded the definition of agritourism, established a program to promote local wineries, farm breweries and distilleries, and established a Farm to Foodbank grant program. In budget language, we also required a task force within the Maryland Department of Agriculture to assess the feasibility of reintroducing meat processing inspections at the state level. Looking forward, I hope to re-introduce legislation to permit a credit against the State income tax for certain qualified capital expenses for use in value-added processing conducted in Maryland.

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?

I believe we need to invest more intelligently in public transit, bus rapid transit and pedestrian/cyclist infrastructure in high- or mid-density areas to preserve rural ones. While I am still learning and meeting people in this new area of District 9, I would not support any project that threatens the Ag Reserve.

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

I believe that instead of viewing materials as "waste," we should view them as resources "out of place" to be repurposed. As a state official, I look forward to our local governments to support their work and provide the necessary resources to enable good, thoughtful policy. I was pleased to support legislation in 2021 and 2022 that required recycling market studies and required large institutions to compost or digest organic materials. There are now processes for "sustainable materials management" used in Europe that can repurpose up to 95% of typical municipal waste. This is the future of the waste management industry, and we should embrace it as quickly as possible.

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

It is my understanding that "Thrive 2050" is currently being decided upon by the Montgomery County Council. I am still engaging with voters in Montgomery County and the County Council to learn about how "Thrive 2050" would impact our day-to-day lives. I want to continue this process and review their decision once it has been made before taking a formal position.

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?

The ability of governmental bodies to engage with their constituents can always be improved. I'm proud of the thorough and prompt service that my office has provided during the last four years, and I look forward to representing and assisting new constituents in Montgomery County. For state departments,

I believe that a significant IT modernization effort is necessary: we can't provide modern, top-tier services if state employees are stuck using servers from the 1980s. As such, I established the Modernize Maryland Commission last year through legislation to guide and oversee this process.