

Montgomery County 2026 Candidate Questionnaire



Personal Information:

Name Lelia True

What Office Are You Seeking in the 2026 Election? Montgomery 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 concise.

(pictured above: One Acre Farm)

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

I'm a Gulf War veteran who commanded 160 soldiers in combat, a West Point graduate, and a Bronze Star recipient. I have managed \$190 million operations at Comcast, advised Fortune 500 companies at McKinsey, and served as Head of School at Washington Waldorf – guiding the school through the pandemic. I moved to Potomac in 2010 with my mother (a 30-year public school teacher), brother, who acted as a 24/7 caretaker for my father, a former non-profit leader, both who have passed away, and my son (now a senior at the Naval Academy). My family's real-life struggles with addiction, hospice care, mental illness and housing costs are why I'm running: Montgomery County needs leaders who have actually led large organizations, balanced real budgets, and made hard decisions in public.

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?

Current public engagement gets a C-minus from me. Too many major land-use decisions — like the Friendship Heights height increases — move forward without published shadow studies, tree inventories, or verifiable stormwater modeling. Residents deserve better than “trust the experts.”

As Councilmember I will:

Take the time to physically visit all locations of major land-use decisions.

Make sure that appropriate technical studies (shadow, traffic, tree, stormwater, fiscal impact) are published in machine-readable format the day staff recommendations are released.

Require mandatory neighborhood workshops with translation and childcare before any zoning vote.

Provide a public dashboard tracking every bill and master plan with clear comment deadlines.

I strongly support re-establishing a properly funded, independent Office of the People's Counsel. No family should need to hire a land-use lawyer just to protect their neighborhood.

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?

Collaboration is broken. The Council, Executive, Planning Board, and state agencies too often work on parallel tracks, creating delays and decisions that don't add up for residents.

I have rebuilt coordination systems at McKinsey, run cross-functional operations across five states at Comcast, and led a school through crisis. I will bring that operational discipline to the Council by:

Creating a standing inter-branch coordination calendar.

Requiring joint briefings on major items before positions harden.

Negotiating formal MOUs with MDOT, MDE, WSSC, and M-NCPPC on cross-border projects (Purple Line, I-270, Potomac River, aquifer protection).

Establishing a fast-track escalation process when alignment fails.

Montgomery County is too large and the challenges too serious for continued silos.



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?

Clean, reliable drinking water is non-negotiable. The Sole Source Aquifer and the Potomac are already under strain, and we are not planning for the water-constrained future we face.

I will:

Enforce strict buffers and impervious-surface limits in the recharge zone.

Fund well-testing assistance for private well owners.

Require every major land-use decision to be stress-tested against drought scenarios, not just historic averages.

Partner aggressively with WSSC, Virginia jurisdictions, and the Interstate Commission on the Potomac River Basin on conservation, leak reduction, reuse, and stormwater capture.

I will not approve large new water-intensive uses (especially hyperscale data centers) until we publish an honest county water budget with real safety margins.

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 is one of Montgomery County's greatest climate assets – it sequesters carbon, recharges our aquifer, manages stormwater, and preserves local food production. I will defend its 1980 boundaries without exception.

To strengthen climate action I will:

Expand multi-year grants for regenerative agriculture, riparian buffers, and farmer-led practices.

Make high-consumption users (especially data centers) pay rates that reflect their true grid and climate impact, with revenue dedicated to the Climate Action Plan and building electrification for working families.

Protect and fully fund the Building Energy Performance Standards program.

Direct more climate dollars up-county where our forests and farms do the heaviest lifting.

The Climate Action Plan is solid; it is simply under-resourced. I will fix that.



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 Dickerson incinerator on schedule. The public-health burden on up-county and Black and brown communities is real and unacceptable.

Closure must be paired with a genuine zero-waste transition: aggressive source reduction, mandatory commercial composting, expanded recycling, producer responsibility, and local infrastructure so we stop exporting our waste problem to other communities. The people who have lived with the facility for decades deserve to help write the closure plan.

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?

Not under current rules and not without full information. Northern Virginia's experience – grid strain, skyrocketing rates, water stress, and rural displacement – is a cautionary tale.

Before any approval I demand independent, published analysis of water use (drought conditions), energy demand and grid upgrades, air quality, noise, tax revenue vs. public costs, and a binding community benefits agreement.

Any facility must be prohibited in the Ag Reserve and aquifer recharge zone, sited only on already-disturbed industrial land, use closed-loop or air cooling, match power with real additional renewables, and publicly report usage quarterly. We will not repeat Loudoun and Prince William's mistakes.



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)

Forests are climate infrastructure, flood control, water protection, and public health assets. I will strengthen the Forest Conservation Law with real no-net-loss requirements, higher replacement ratios for mature trees, and a public canopy-loss tracker. Every major project must publish a tree inventory upfront. On invasives I will expand funding for removal crews (including youth employment), offer residential and farm assistance programs, and support a nursery sales ban on the worst offenders.

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

My default is natural grass with proper maintenance and irrigation. Where synthetic is proposed, I require independent health and environmental assessments, PFAS-free certification, and runoff controls, and full community input – especially from parents and athletes.



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 average farmer age is 59. We are one generation from losing the working farms the Ag Reserve was created to protect. The County must become a far more active partner.

I will fight for:

Farmland succession programs, land trusts, and lease-bridge support so retiring farmers can transition land to new and diverse producers.

Lower operating costs through fair tax assessments and on-farm infrastructure (cold storage, processing). Stronger farm-to-school and farm-to-institution purchasing.

Beginning-farmer training pipelines with Montgomery College and UMD Extension.

Cost-share for regenerative practices, cover crops, and riparian buffers.

The Reserve only works if there are farmers in it. I will make sure the next generation can stay on the land.