

# Montgomery County 2026 Candidate Questionnaire



## Personal Information:

**Name** Lou Bartolo

**What Office Are You Seeking in the 2026 Election?** State Senate District 16

## 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 am a Doctoral-prepared registered nurse, regulatory affairs expert, and civic leader who has spent my career at the intersection of healthcare, public policy, and community advocacy. As Immediate Past President of the Maryland Nurses Association, I understand how policy decisions shape the lives of real families. I live in Chevy Chase and am running for State Senate to bring evidence-based leadership to Annapolis and ensure that every resident of District 16 has a voice that is heard and honored.

**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 is the foundation of democratic governance, and Montgomery County has significant room for improvement. I would champion real-time, plain-language publications, easy links to state data on Montgomery County, and evening or weekend meeting options to make participation accessible to

working families and those with caregiving responsibilities.

I would grade current public engagement a C. While some mechanisms exist, they disproportionately benefit those with time, resources, and political connections. Residents in underrepresented communities and rural areas often feel that decisions are made before they ever have a chance to weigh in.

I strongly support re-establishing the Office of the People's Counsel. An independent advocate to represent the public interest in utility, zoning, and land use proceedings is essential. The elimination of that office left a gap that residents feel, and restoring it would be a meaningful step toward transparency and accountability, which is not fully available at this time.

**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, the siloed structure of local and state governance too often produces duplication, delays, and missed opportunities for coordinated action. As a nurse and regulatory professional, I understand how critical clear communication and defined roles are to effective outcomes.

I would work to establish regular joint briefings between County Council members and state legislative counterparts to align priorities and avoid conflicts. I would advocate for formal interagency liaisons to ensure that state-level legislative developments are systematically communicated to county planning and executive staff, and vice versa. I would also push for a publicly accessible tracking dashboard showing where state and county decisions intersect on major issues such as housing, water, transportation, and climate, so residents can see how their government is working together on their behalf.



**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 water is a human right and a public health imperative, and protecting both our groundwater and the Potomac River must be among our highest legislative priorities.

For the Sole Source Aquifer, I will support strengthening monitoring programs and increasing funding for rural water quality testing so that residents served by private wells have the same level of assurance of safety as those on public systems.

For the Potomac River, I will advocate for rigorous water withdrawal permitting that accounts for climate projections and cumulative demand, including from data centers, which consume enormous volumes of water for cooling. Any hyperscale data center siting must include a comprehensive water impact assessment, and operators should be required to invest in closed-loop or low-consumption cooling technology as a condition of approval.

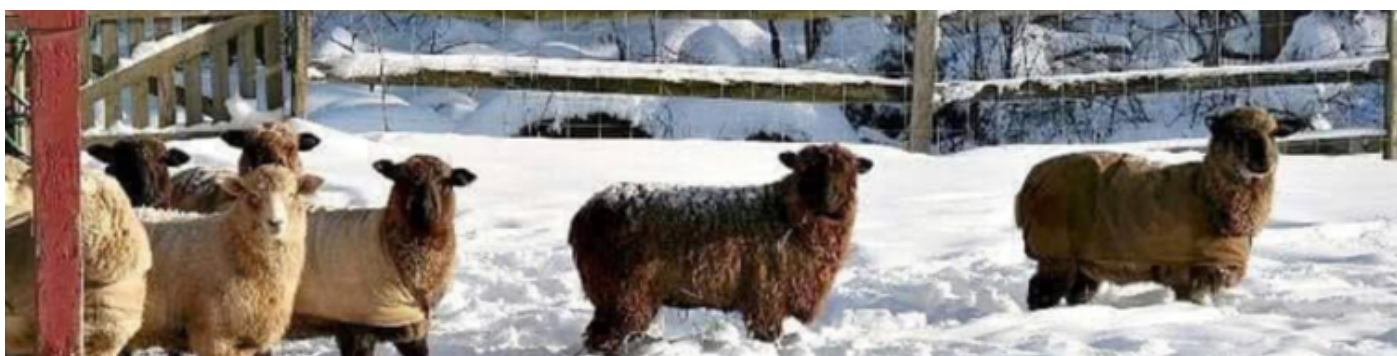
To plan for a water-constrained future, I would prioritize: (1) investment in water reclamation and recycling infrastructure; (2) conservation incentive programs for agricultural producers and businesses; (3) updated zoning standards that incorporate water sustainability assessments for large-scale development; and (4) active participation in regional interstate compacts to manage Potomac Basin resources equitably and sustainably. My background in regulatory affairs gives me the tools to translate these priorities into enforceable, durable policy.

**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 most powerful and underutilized climate assets. Protecting the Reserve from development pressure is itself a climate action, and expanding its climate benefits through practices like cover cropping and soil health programs would make it even more valuable.

I come from a family rooted in Louisiana's farming and fishing traditions, so I understand firsthand how agriculture and environmental stewardship are inseparable. I will work to expand the county's climate resilience funds, including through targeted grants to farmers adopting regenerative practices and partnerships with universities and agricultural extension programs.

On energy taxation, I believe high-consumption facilities, particularly hyperscale data centers, should bear a proportionate share of the community's climate costs. I support a review of the county's energy tax structure with an eye toward ensuring that large industrial consumers contribute meaningfully to our clean energy transition and climate adaptation funds, rather than shifting those costs to residents and small businesses.



**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 closure of the Dickerson incinerator. Waste incineration, even with modern pollution controls, produces fine particulate matter, heavy metals, and greenhouse gases that disproportionately burden nearby communities. Prolonging the life of this facility delays our transition to a more sustainable, equitable waste management model.

I believe Montgomery County should accelerate investment in waste-reduction, reuse, and composting infrastructure to reduce what we incinerate in the first place. I will work to ensure that rural communities like Dickerson are not left to bear environmental burdens that serve the broader county population without adequate investment and remediation.

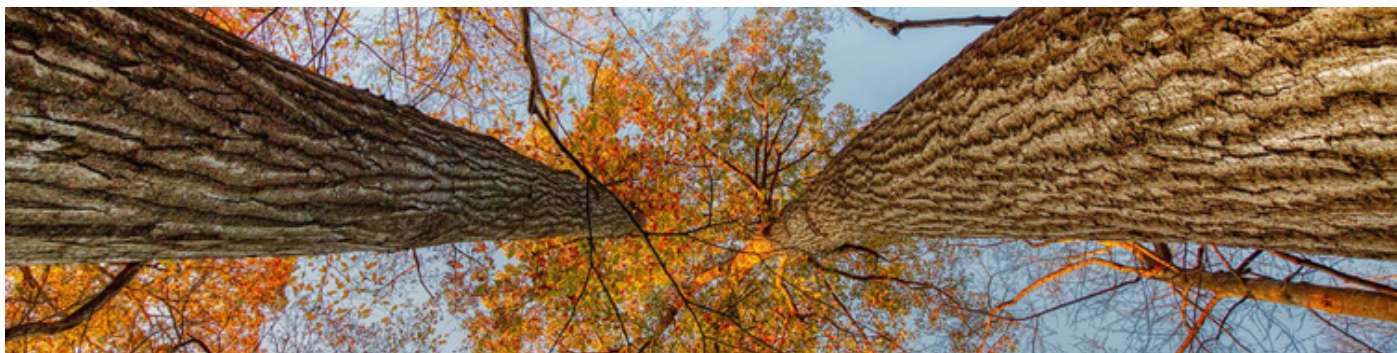
**Should Montgomery County host hyperscale Data Centers? If so, what zoning standards and regulations should be established? Have we gathered all the necessary information to make an informed decision at this time?**

I do not believe Montgomery County has yet gathered all the information necessary to make an informed, responsible decision about hosting hyperscale data centers, and I am deeply cautious about proceeding without that information in hand.

The impacts on our power grid, our water resources, our traffic infrastructure, our noise environment, and

property values are significant and not yet fully assessed. I believe we must require comprehensive environmental impact assessments, water consumption analyses, and grid capacity studies before any approvals move forward.

If the County ultimately determines that some data center development is appropriate, zoning standards should include: minimum setbacks from residential areas and agricultural land; mandatory low-consumption cooling technology; water reclamation requirements; noise and visual impact mitigation; transparent reporting on energy and water use; and meaningful local employment and tax revenue requirements commensurate with infrastructure demands. Residents and communities must have a seat at the table in this process.



**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 not optional infrastructure as they are essential to clean air, clean water, temperature regulation, and the mental and physical health of our communities. Protecting Montgomery County's tree canopy and natural forest cover would be a core priority throughout my time as Senator.

I will advocate for strengthening the county's Forest Conservation Law to close loopholes that allow significant tree loss in development projects, and for increasing replanting requirements that prioritize native species. I support expanding funding for the county's forest stewardship programs, including proactive management of invasive and non-native plant species that crowd out native biodiversity and degrade habitat quality.

Invasive species control is often underfunded and underappreciated, and yet it is among the most cost-effective environmental investments we can make. I would work to expand partnerships with the Agricultural Reserve, county parks, and community volunteer programs to accelerate the removal of invasive species and restore native vegetation that supports pollinators, wildlife, and watershed health.

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

I approach this issue as both a healthcare professional and as I was a parent of communities that depend on quality recreational spaces. The evidence on synthetic turf is evolving, and I believe the precautionary principle should guide our decisions.

Recent peer-reviewed research has raised legitimate concerns about PFAS, heavy metals, and other compounds from synthetic turf materials. Until we have clearer scientific evidence regarding the long-term health impacts on children, I believe the county should pause new installations of synthetic turf in favor of natural grass alternatives where feasible, with appropriate investment in maintenance and irrigation infrastructure.

For existing fields, I support ongoing monitoring and transparent reporting of air and water quality data, with a commitment to remediation if problems are identified. Decisions about recreational infrastructure should be made with the health and safety of our children as the primary consideration.



**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)**

Agricultural vitality and food security are deeply personal priorities for me. Growing up with family roots in Louisiana's fishing and farming communities, I understand that local food production is not just an economic activity – it is a form of community resilience.

The generational transition challenge facing our farming community is urgent. With the average producer at 59 and land lease costs out of reach for emerging farmers, we risk losing both the knowledge and the land base that sustain local agriculture.

I will work to: (1) expand the county's agricultural purchase of development rights programs to keep land affordable for farmers; (2) establish a dedicated beginning farmer program that pairs new producers with a focus on diversity and equity with retiring farmers for mentorship and land access; (3) increase county investment in farmers' markets, farm-to-institution procurement, and local food hub infrastructure to strengthen market access and economic viability; and (4) work with the University of Maryland Extension Service to expand technical and business assistance for small and beginning farmers.

A thriving Agricultural Reserve requires thriving farmers. These investments are not charity and they are smart economic and public health policy for the long term.