

Montgomery County 2026 Candidate Questionnaire



Personal Information:

Name

Marc Elrich

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?

www.marcelrich.org



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've lived in Montgomery County since 1961 and that long relationship with this place is what drives my commitment to protecting what makes it special, including our AG Reserve. I served as a Takoma Park City Councilmember, then as a Montgomery County Councilmember for 12 years, and now as County Executive, where I've worked to balance growth with the preservation of our natural resources, open spaces, and agricultural heritage. As a former teacher, small business owner, and union member, I understand that the County's strength comes from its people, its land, and the communities that depend on both.

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 requires both accessible information and meaningful opportunity to participate. I believe the county must provide clear, timely public notice on land use decisions, make meeting materials genuinely accessible (not just technically available), and ensure that community input actually shapes outcomes. I

would grade current public engagement as a work in progress: we have made strides but there are real gaps, especially in reaching communities that are not already organized. I support re-establishing the Office of the People's Counsel, which provides an important independent voice for residents in land use proceedings who otherwise lack the resources to engage effectively with well-funded applicants. Park and Planning has fundamentally changed the planning process to create a top down, staff/board driven process where people are ignored, their concerns dismissed and the impact of plans is primarily to support real estate interests. I served on citizen planning committees where staff was there to support residents, answer questions and help to frame solutions. Today the citizens are reduced to being told what planning has already decided to do. It's destructive for communities and completely ignores our existing master plans.

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?

The relationship between the Executive, Council, Planning Board, and state agencies can definitely be improved. Too often these bodies operate in silos (many times without community input) leading to decisions that are not well-coordinated across transportation, land use, environmental protection, and housing policy. I would seek to end the duplication where planning and county government agencies duplicate work. No other jurisdiction has our system - traditionally, planning is in the executive branch, not independent. It makes it more expensive, less efficient and creates an unelected and unaccountable planning board that can function in isolation from the county government. Good outcomes come from people working toward a shared goal, and that requires building those relationships before a crisis forces them.



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?

Protecting our groundwater and the Potomac River is not optional, it is foundational. For rural residents dependent on wells drawing from the Sole Source Aquifer, I will prioritize buffer zone protections, strict review of any land use activities that threaten recharge areas, and resources for well testing and remediation where contamination is found. The Potomac deserves the same seriousness: I support strong protections for riparian buffers and will work with regional partners to limit pollutant loads. As you know, I fought alongside you to protect Ten Mile Creek and to get the council to recognize the fragility and interdependence of the creek. On the question of water scarcity, which is real and growing, I am deeply concerned about the water demands of large data centers, and I believe we must require rigorous water use analysis before approving any such facilities. Planning for a water-constrained future means integrating water availability into land use decisions now, not after demand has outpaced supply.

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 our most powerful climate assets. Healthy farmland and forests sequester carbon, reduce stormwater runoff, recharge aquifers, and lower the urban heat island effect across the entire county. I will work to expand grant making for land conservation, agricultural practices that build soil health, and farm energy efficiency programs. On energy taxation: I support reviewing how we structure energy costs, particularly for high-consumption users like data centers, and ensuring that the tax structure reflects the true environmental and infrastructure costs they impose. I also support tying energy costs to production costs rather than market auction prices, which would better align incentives for both consumers and producers. Finally, we need a real framework in place before any major datacenter begins construction, which would include both energy reliance and environmental impact. As far as funding goes, we need to increase the resources that are available. Our current tax resources, as this budget has shown, do not match our needs and that pits schools, social programs, community organizations and environmental investments against each other. We need to start building budgets around what we need to do and figure out how to get the resources to act on what we know.



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 long-planned closure of the trash incinerator in Dickerson. Incineration is not a sustainable or equitable waste management solution, it produces air pollution and ash that disproportionately impacts nearby communities, and it undermines our ability to invest seriously in zero-waste approaches. Closing the incinerator should be paired with serious investment in recycling, composting, and waste reduction infrastructure so that we are not simply shifting the problem elsewhere. This has been a priority for me and I remain committed to following through on it.

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 have serious concerns about siting hyperscale data centers in Montgomery County, particularly near or affecting the Agricultural Reserve, water resources, or residential communities. These facilities consume enormous amounts of electricity and water, generate significant noise, and offer relatively few local jobs for their footprint. Like I said before, before the county approves any hyperscale data center development, we need a comprehensive assessment of cumulative impacts on water supply, energy infrastructure, and land use. I do not believe we have gathered all the necessary information to make informed decisions at this time, and I would support a pause on major approvals until that analysis is complete. Any facilities that are approved must be subject to rigorous zoning standards covering water use, noise, energy sourcing, and community impact.



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 essential infrastructure for clean air, clean water, carbon sequestration, and biodiversity. I am committed to strengthening forest conservation efforts, including meaningful enforcement of our forest conservation law and closing loopholes that allow net loss through mitigation. Controlling invasive and non-native plant species is an underappreciated part of that work: invasives choke out native plant communities that wildlife depend on, degrade forest health, and increase erosion and runoff. I support expanded investment in invasive species management on public lands and incentives and technical assistance for private landowners, including farmers, to address invasive species on their properties.

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

I have real concerns about synthetic turf fields and believe we need to apply the precautionary principle. The evidence on PFAS and other chemical exposures from synthetic turf (particularly for children) is concerning and still emerging. I would not support expanding synthetic turf installations. Natural turf, when properly installed and maintained, is a viable alternative and it is the better choice for health and environmental reasons, including heat island effects, stormwater absorption, and the absence of toxic chemicals. If fields must be replaced, I would prioritize natural alternatives.



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)

Keeping farming viable in the Ag Reserve requires active intervention, not just protection from development. The average farmer age of 59 tells us we have a succession crisis on our hands. I support expanding the County's farmland leasing programs with affordable, long-term leases targeted at beginning and diverse farmers who cannot afford to purchase land at current prices. I also support agricultural easement programs that reduce the cost basis of farmland and keep it in production across generations. We should invest in direct farmer support, like technical assistance, infrastructure grants, and connections to local markets, that makes farming economically viable for the next generation. I support processing operations that can help farmers get more value from their crops while they generate less waste. We need to help farmers link to commercial consumers, grocery stores and restaurants. Without coordination and planning, creating new markets will remain a challenge. Stores and restaurants need to know what and

when crops can be produced and farmers need to know that if they move to supply these businesses that the orders for their crops will be there. That is something we should work to develop. The County's food system resilience depends on keeping land in active, local agricultural production, and I take that seriously.