



Montgomery County 2022 Candidate Questionnaire - Marc Elrich

Personal Information:

Name

Marc Elrich

What Office Are You Seeking in the 2022 Election?

Montgomery County Executive

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.

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 the over 90,000 acres comprising over 30% of the county that was set aside to protect not only agriculture but also to protect the environment. The land in the reserve serves to filter water, clean the air and provide a break from the heat islands that occupy large parts of the county. We have a thriving agricultural community where land management practices make it one of the leading areas in the state. The creation of the Reserve put the brakes on suburban sprawl by creating a vast area that can't accommodate suburban expansion and was a visionary recognition that we can't just pave the county over.

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

I have worked over my last 15 years, as a councilmember and now the Executive, to preserve and protect the Ag Reserve. I been willing to work to find a balanced approached towards increasing the economic viability of the farms in the reserve, recognizing that for farmers to preserve it, agriculture needs to be economically viable. I want to make sure we can support farming and activities that help them process their products - selling a finished product is more rewarding than just selling a raw material. I'd like to work to encourage greater production of table crops that would increase the county's food resiliency and to help link farmers to markets and I believe we have to get the school system to shift its model for producing student meals to increase reliance on products from the reserve - this is a very large potential market. And I'd like to improve local markets for their crops by creating marketing links between our farmers and restaurants, grocery stores and direct consumers.

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

It is imperative that we protect our water supply and that's why I led on protecting Ten Mile Creek and in the subsequent battles to prevent the planning board from undoing the work we did. I support protecting our forests and move away from allowing developers to cut trees in the southern part of the county and get credits for "preserving" existing tree stands and actually planting new trees to replace the ones that were cut. I would like to see the land used actively for farming and minimal use of farmland and parkland that require building more trails, increasing imperviousness, or doing other things that can degrade the land in the course of providing more recreational activities. Forests and streams to not have to accommodate great human use in order to justify their value - they're valuable on environmental grounds alone.

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

Fighting to preserve ten mile creek was the first major battle. In general, I'd look to increasing limits on imperviousness that are too lax today, reduce the exceptions to water quality or quantity regulations. I do not support expansion of sewer and water that would intensify land use in rural areas that lack basic infrastructure and that would require further expensive infrastructure projects to support the development. We need to do better managing the impact of stormwater from new developments and we're already going to have engage in major retrofits of our outdated systems. My goal is to reduce as much of the run-off as possible before it reaches a storm drain. My office has been active in these issues and will continue to be.

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

As I said the forests, fields and streams already play a critical role in preserving the quality of our water and the air we breathe. If anything, I want to encourage diversification of crops toward more food production. ancillary processing uses that increase the value of a farmers crops and that allow them to realize that value.

My priorities are pretty straight-forward - shift our energy usage toward electric, eliminate fossil fuels to the greatest extent possible, set higher environmental/ghg reduction targets on both new and existing construction, transition vehicle fleets to electricity, increase public education and provide incentives because achieving our goals is only possible if individuals make choices that eliminate their fossil fuel usage. I supported and lobbied for the Community Choice Energy bill that will allow the county to be the buyer of electricity for the county.

I support solar in the reserve, but I want any solar installations that go beyond meeting a farms immediate needs, such as community solar, to be required to incorporate agrivoltaics. I think the literature on this is encouraging and we're doing a pilot project on the Poolesville golf course so we can research which crops can grow best under solar and in the climate conditions of the Ag Reserve.

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

I'd like to follow up, now that covid is interfering less in our work, on a food hub and some food processing facilities in the northern part of county near or in the Ag Reserve – Poolesville comes to mind. I have staffed the Ag office to increase their ability to be more active promoting agriculture. These are good for Ag but would also bring more jobs to the area. I was very much involved in the wine crush pad and think we could develop wineries at a similar scale to parts of Northern Virginia. Wine is certainly playing an increasing role in the Farming community, and it has lots of potential here. The small towns could easily benefit from the potential of wine tourism.

As I said above, linking farms to local end users will facilitate a shift to more table crops

I'd also like to see MARC rail expanded to all day bi-directional service – it would make necessary commutes less painful, remove traffic off of 270 and improve the quality of life for residents who live in the Reserve and adjoining areas.

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 support using reversible lanes from I-70 down 270 to the American Legion bridge and they don't need to be toll lanes. We plan on providing BRT on 355 into Clarksburg from Bethesda, add a reversible lane to 355 and eliminate the bottle neck by the high school when the road goes down to 2 lanes, total. I do not support the outer beltway, another bridge, or M-83 – all positions that I've worked alongside your group and other environmentalists for many years now.

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

My goal is shut the incinerator down. We are currently reviewing proposals for changing the way we handle solid waste and we'll create a plan that lets us shut it down. This year we're moving into food waste it will become mandatory in the county. It will wind up being composted, digested or both, the plan would also increase recycling and greatly reduce the volume of waste that will have to go to a landfill. There is no role for incineration in this.

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

Thrive 2050 should not have been done in the midst of a pandemic and it needed and continues to need input from the many different communities. You can read the letter I sent outlining my many concerns here: https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/OPI/Resources/Files/pdf/2021/CE_Stmt_Thrive-Montgomery-2050.pdf The County Council's Office of Legislative Oversight reaffirmed my concerns in its memo about racial equity and social justice - the plan is short on details and missing important meaningful input.

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?

There are always ways to make interactions work better. I believe in transparency and ongoing conversations. People need to work together to listen and problem solve. One of the positive things during covid was our ongoing conversations with the county council, the state delegation, community advisory groups and our nonprofit partners.