



Montgomery County 2022 Candidate Questionnaire - Natali Fani-Gonzalez

Personal Information:

Name Natali Fani-González

What Office Are You Seeking in the 2022 Election? County Council District 6

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 the jewel of Montgomery County. This area is under a land conservation policy designed to protect farmland, agriculture and rural open space. It comprises nearly a third of the county's land – and extends along the county's northern, eastern and western borders – from the Patuxent River to the Potomac River. This is the place you go for pick-your-own berries. In the fall, this is where I go with my husband and children to pumpkin patch.

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

We must maximize the benefits of the Agricultural Reserve through policies designed to ensure the continued viability of farming as an economically productive and sustainable activity, discourage sprawl, facilitate a broad range of outdoor recreation and tourism activities, conserve land and natural resources, and promote practices that advance environmental quality.

We also must improve access to the Ag Reserve for the public to experience and directly benefit from this valuable resource for locally grown food, outdoor recreation, and tourism.

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

As a former Planning Board Member, I have a strong track record protecting our natural resources and parkland. The continued preservation of the Ag Reserve, along with the county's park system, also protects the county's forests, wetlands, meadows and streams, supports biodiversity and natural habitats, and protects watersheds, aquifers, and water quality. A couple of key issues for me relate to maintenance and improvement in measures of stream water quality. Also, the reduction in impervious cover and increase in area of impervious cover treated. We need to modernize our water and sewer systems (this is outside the Ag Reserve, yet it affects our streams). Also, although the Ag Reserve is not in my district, I would LOVE to increase awareness within District 6 residents, the Agricultural Reserve's assets through education of agricultural practices and better wayfinding while providing inclusive and equitable access to the Ag Reserve.

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

I will work to update the County's vulnerability assessments in my district, including updating floodplain maps and modernizing water and sewer systems. That's key for me. Please note that I'm a certified Climate Change Officer by the Association of Climate Change Officers: <https://climateofficers.org> I will work to ensure that we update our policies to truly do everything in our power to protect our planet.

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

Besides what I mentioned above as priorities for me, I would share that Montgomery County has made progress in reducing its greenhouse gas emissions, a key contributor to climate change, but has much farther to go to meet its goal of eliminating these emissions by 2035. Together, buildings and transportation are responsible for more than 90 percent of our county's greenhouse gas emissions, making reduced reliance on driving and more energy-efficient development patterns essential to meeting our climate objectives. In terms of the Ag Reserve, as stated above: I think we must ensure the continued viability of farming as an economically productive and sustainable activity, discourage sprawl, conserve land and natural resources, and promote practices that advance environmental quality.

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

As a former Planning Board member, I worked on the Agritourism Study, which examines issues raised by farmers, entrepreneurs, community members, planners and regulators. I hope to become a County Councilwoman to implement the recommendations on that study and ensure District 6 residents get to visit, respect and embrace our gorgeous Ag Reserve!

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?

1. Veirs Mill Road BRT – I even made a video on Veirs Mill Road: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mlbMfv1YUco>
2. Georgia Ave Improvement Design – not just in Montgomery Hills, but all the way - particularly in activity centers like Wheaton, Aspen Hill, Forest Glen.
3. Bikeways: protected bike lanes to connect our communities, including the breezeway from Glenmont to Silver Spring.
4. Forest Glen Pedestrian tunnel...must happen pronto!
5. Sidewalk retrofit programs targeting places with heavy bus riders, and areas where we should have efficient bus routes.

My Planning Board record reflects my strong position in favor of transit: increasing bus routes, creating more protected bike lanes and walkable communities. I strongly oppose M-83 and adding lanes to the Beltway and 270 as they DO NOT reduce congestion. No to the additional Potomac Bridge.

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

The incinerator in Dickerson should be shut down. Now, how can we make Montgomery County a zero waste community; in a County where we still allow the use of plastic bags instead of banning them. I support setting measurable goals towards zero waste – this is clearly part of the climate emergency work. San Francisco and Toronto are places to look as role models; they collect food scraps! How are we not doing this already? We should ban plastic bags too. There are communities using Pay-As-You-Throw (PAYT) programs where residents/businesses are charged a fee for each bag or garbage-can of waste they generate. Basically, the less individuals throw away, the less they pay, which is a strong incentive to reduce waste. It is incredible the amount of waste we produce in the United States; particularly in Montgomery County. I think we need a cultural shift that focuses on creating a caring economy that protects our planet, which means being active and responsible individuals to protect our planet. So yes, let's work on food scraps! I compost in my house :)

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

Montgomery County, as well as every other county in Maryland and the City of Baltimore, is doing a

general plan update, particularly using 2020 census data. The draft of the general plan is already before the Council and I will be participating in all the community meetings taking place in my district - and even outside my district whenever possible - my understanding is that these community meetings are happening this summer and fall - to dig into resident's concerns.

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?

Yes, absolutely. I think elected officials have a duty to go to the community to get input and find ways to ensure our policies are inclusive and actually protect our communities. When I was a member of the Planning Board, I noticed that people with my background weren't coming to provide their views on master plans, so I literally managed to get planners and videographers to join me in getting feedback from our community members instead of waiting for folks to come to a Planning Board meeting to testify. Here is an example: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mlbMfv1YUco>