



# Montgomery County 2022 Candidate Questionnaire - Robert Wu

## Personal Information:

**Name** Robert Wu

**What Office Are You Seeking in the 2022 Election?** County Council (District 3)

## Where Can Voters Learn More About Your Positions Or Contact Your Campaign?

Please visit our campaign's website <http://www.voterobwu.com> or shoot us me email at [rob@voterobwu.com](mailto:rob@voterobwu.com)

**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 probably the single greatest land use decision made in Montgomery County and it is what sets us apart from other jurisdictions in the metropolitan Washington D.C. area. It was a decision made to preserve the rural character of parts of the county by encumbering farmland in the Ag Reserve, while compensating owners with saleable rights to development elsewhere in the County. The Ag Reserve is important because it provides a vital link to our agrarian past, while also providing vital greenspace/open space for all of us to enjoy. It is a true gem.

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

In my view, it is important to preserve the Ag Reserve and to prevent encroachment of uses that might lead to the degradation of its agrarian character. The long-term success of the Ag Reserve will depend on keeping its farms productive, and perhaps incentivizing uses such as organic farming to help introduce future generations to farming practices and its benefits. I am also in favor of promoting compatible uses, such as wineries, breweries, and cideries, where those uses have a link to agrarian output. I would also support the expansion of solar production in the Ag Reserve where such use is compatible with the agrarian character of the area.

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

This is a priority both inside the Ag Reserve and outside. Efficient land use that preserves greenspace and open space is key, as is preserving or even increasing our tree canopy throughout the County. I have been a consistent advocate for such priorities in the City of Gaithersburg, whether it be in development projects or increasing tree density on public lands, it is important. We also need to reduce our impact on Mother Earth, whether through reduction of use of harmful pesticides, reducing and diverting our waste stream, and moving away from fossil fuels, and towards efficient use of renewable energy.

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

There are various ways we can improve the quality of our drinking water, from reduction of harmful pesticide use to reducing/diverting our waste stream, which often-times finds its way into our

waterways. We also need to reduce the flow of other harmful pollutants into our water, such as salt that is used primarily in response to winter weather. This issue has garnered a lot of attention as of late, and the City is actively considering ways to reduce our use of salts, as well as work with residents to reduce their salt use. Another example is the preservation or expansion of green buffers around our waterways and reservoirs. By maintaining or expanding natural filtration around these water sources, it will work to improve the quality of our water supply

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

We need to build on the County's Climate Action Plan, setting concrete steps to achieve our climate-related goals equitably across the County. I will focus on efficient land use, preservation of green spaces, expansion of non-fossil fuel based transportation infrastructure, incentivize energy reduction practices, and use of alternative energy sources in our homes, businesses and public spaces. The Ag Reserve plays a critical role in meeting our obligations to address climate change. First, by its very nature the Ag Reserve prevents sprawl and other harmful development that takes us in the wrong direction. Second, the Ag Reserve acts as a green lung for the County, providing environmental benefits due to its rural nature. Finally, the Ag Reserve can serve as a catalyst for reducing our reliance on fossil fuels through the appropriate use of land for the generation of solar energy.

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

Respecting our local farms and rural communities and the value they provide to the County is important. The County can support these activities through grants for economic development and other direct support to organizations in or supporting the Ag Reserve, support educational opportunities for our residents and particularly students to learn about and engage with our farms, and promote activities in our Ag Reserve, for example, with respect to tourism to bring economic development to the area. These are a few areas that come to mind, and I am eager to learn more about CSA's priorities in this regard.

### **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 will focus on making 355 BRT and Veirs Mill Road Flash BRT both a reality. I will also prioritize expanded MARC service, completion of the Purple Line and realizing the County Bike Master Plan. While I-270 traffic relief and improving the Legion Bridge are also important, I oppose expansion of expensive, private toll lanes. For me, high-capacity transit is a vital priority. I do not support M83 or an additional Potomac Bridge and outer beltway through the Reserve or adjacent rural zones.

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

We have been waiting some time for the County to act on the promise of closing the incinerator. I will be interested in engaging in strategies to make that a reality. However, the best way to obviate the need for incineration, landfills or shipping our wastestream to other areas, is to reduce and divert our waste. Recycling and composting are important strategies in doing just that. There have been quite a few actions at the State and local levels in this area, but more can and should be done.

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

I think that Thrive 2050 sets forth an important vision for the County, that in many ways encapsulates the trajectory the County has taken since the last general plan was enacted. I appreciate the plan's focus on both denser areas of the County, but also its recognition of the importance of the Ag Reserve and other rural areas of the County. While I support the overarching vision of Thrive 2050, I do have concerns about the process that got us to this point. In particular, there have been recently raised concerns within the County government itself as to the potential for disparate impacts of the plan on underserved and minority communities, as well as concern about the level of input these communities had into the draft plan. I think steps should be taken to address these 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?**

Very much so. Since I was elected to the Gaithersburg City Council in 2015, I have had the privilege and opportunity to observe the interactions of government at various levels, and particularly from the vantage point of matters relevant to the City. The relationship between the County and the City is good, but could be improved, as could our interactions with the State. What I have seen as I have had the opportunity to focus on County government itself, has caused me concern. It seems that there could be improvements in the way the Council, Executive, Staff and various bodies work with, and communicate with each other. I think that efforts should be taken by the next council and administration to improve the pathways of interaction. It would take too long for me to offer ideas on how to do that here, but I am happy to talk!