

# Montgomery County 2026 Candidate Questionnaire



## Personal Information:

**Name** Sonia Garcia

**What Office Are You Seeking in the 2026 Election?** County Council District 6

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

Website: <https://www.soniagarciaforcouncildistrict6.com>

instagram: @soniaformococouncil



**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 lifelong Montgomery County resident, scientist, and former NIH program analyst running for County Council District 6 because I believe residents deserve transparent, community-centered leadership. As the daughter of Salvadoran immigrants and a first-generation Ph.D., my background in science and public service has shaped my commitment to data-driven decision-making, accessibility, and meaningful public engagement. After my federal layoff, I became deeply involved in local organizing and land-use discussions, where I saw firsthand how important it is for residents to be informed, respected, and included early in decisions affecting their communities.

**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?**

Government transparency and meaningful public engagement are foundational to building public trust,

especially around legislative and land-use decisions that can significantly impact residents' homes, neighborhoods, infrastructure, and quality of life.

Montgomery County can improve transparency by engaging residents earlier in the process, providing clearer and more accessible information, expanding multilingual outreach, improving responsiveness to public records requests, and ensuring residents have adequate time and meaningful opportunities to participate before decisions are finalized. I also believe the County should hold more community-based meetings throughout affected neighborhoods – not just centralized hearings – and strengthen communication with residents who may not traditionally participate in government processes. Based on what I have heard from residents throughout District 6, I believe current public engagement often feels reactive and procedural rather than genuinely collaborative. Too many residents feel they are informed after key decisions are already shaped, and many leave public processes feeling unheard or overwhelmed by highly technical systems that are difficult to navigate without resources or legal expertise.

I do support re-establishing the Office of the People's Counsel. Land-use and zoning matters can be extremely technical, and many residents, especially working families, seniors, and historically underrepresented communities, do not have the resources to hire attorneys or planning experts to help them navigate complex processes. An Office of the People's Counsel can help improve fairness, accessibility, transparency, and public confidence by ensuring residents have access to technical guidance and a stronger voice in land-use proceedings.

**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, I believe collaboration and coordination between the County Executive, County Council, Planning Board, state agencies, and other governmental entities can and should be improved.

One concern I consistently hear from residents is that agencies and branches of government often appear disconnected from one another, which can create confusion, inconsistent communication, delays in information sharing, and a lack of accountability during major legislative, transportation, infrastructure, and land-use processes. Residents should not have to navigate fragmented systems to understand decisions that directly impact their homes and communities.

I believe stronger collaboration starts with earlier coordination and more transparent communication between agencies before major proposals move forward publicly. That includes improving interagency planning around infrastructure capacity, transportation impacts, environmental protections, school capacity, water resources, and long-term growth projections so decisions are made more holistically rather than in silos.

I would also support:

More joint public work sessions and community meetings between agencies and branches of government  
Earlier engagement with affected communities before plans are finalized

Improved data sharing and public access to information

Greater coordination between county and state entities on transportation and infrastructure projects

Stronger accountability measures to ensure agencies are responsive to public concerns and timelines

As someone with a scientific and public service background, I strongly value data-driven decision-making and cross-functional collaboration. I believe government works best when agencies communicate clearly with one another, engage communities honestly, and approach long-term planning in a coordinated and transparent way.



**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 source water must be treated as a core public health, environmental, and economic responsibility. Rural residents, farms, and businesses depend on clean groundwater, and the Potomac River is a critical drinking water source for the broader region. As a scientist, I believe these decisions must be guided by data, long-term planning, and prevention rather than reacting after contamination or shortages occur.

I would prioritize stronger protections for groundwater recharge areas, stricter review of land-use decisions that could affect wells or aquifers, expanded water quality monitoring, and better coordination between the County, WSSC Water, state agencies, and regional partners. I would also support investments in stormwater management, forest preservation, stream buffers, and agricultural best practices that reduce runoff and protect both groundwater and surface water.

Given increasing drought conditions and rising water demand, Montgomery County must plan seriously for a water-constrained future. I have significant concerns about hyperscale data centers because of their enormous water and energy consumption and the potential impacts on surrounding communities, infrastructure, and environmental resources. I do not support moving forward with data center projects unless they are subject to rigorous environmental review, strict water-use and energy-efficiency standards, meaningful community engagement, and clear protections demonstrating they will not negatively impact local residents, groundwater resources, or the broader environment. Any consideration of these facilities should also prioritize renewable and sustainable energy sources rather than placing additional strain on existing systems.

During my term, I would prioritize policies that protect the Potomac River, strengthen watershed protections, conserve forests and farmland, modernize stormwater infrastructure, and ensure that growth decisions are tied to actual environmental and infrastructure capacity. Clean water is not optional. It is foundational to public health, agriculture, climate resilience, and the long-term sustainability of Montgomery County.

**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 plays a critical role in Montgomery County's climate resilience, environmental health, and long-term sustainability. Protecting farmland, forests, stream buffers, and open space helps reduce heat impacts, improve air and water quality, support biodiversity, absorb carbon emissions, and strengthen local food systems. The Reserve is not only an agricultural resource, but also an environmental asset that helps balance growth and protect natural systems for future generations.

I believe Montgomery County should continue exploring policies and investments that strengthen climate resilience while also being mindful of current fiscal realities and budget constraints facing the County. As someone with a scientific background, I believe climate-related decision-making should be grounded in long-term sustainability, environmental data, infrastructure capacity, and public health considerations.

I do believe high-energy-use industries and projects, including potential data centers, should be carefully evaluated for their environmental, water, and infrastructure impacts. It is reasonable to review whether current policies and fee structures adequately account for the strain these types of facilities can place on energy systems, water resources, and surrounding communities.



**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 Dickerson incinerator because of the environmental and public health concerns associated with the facility, including pollution impacts on surrounding communities, farmland, air quality, and natural resources within the Agricultural Reserve. I also believe the County should have acted more proactively years ago to better prepare for this transition. Long-term environmental goals require long-term planning, coordination, and investment, and delays in making difficult decisions can create greater financial and logistical challenges later on. Residents should not be placed in a position where environmental progress feels unattainable because planning and implementation were postponed for too long.

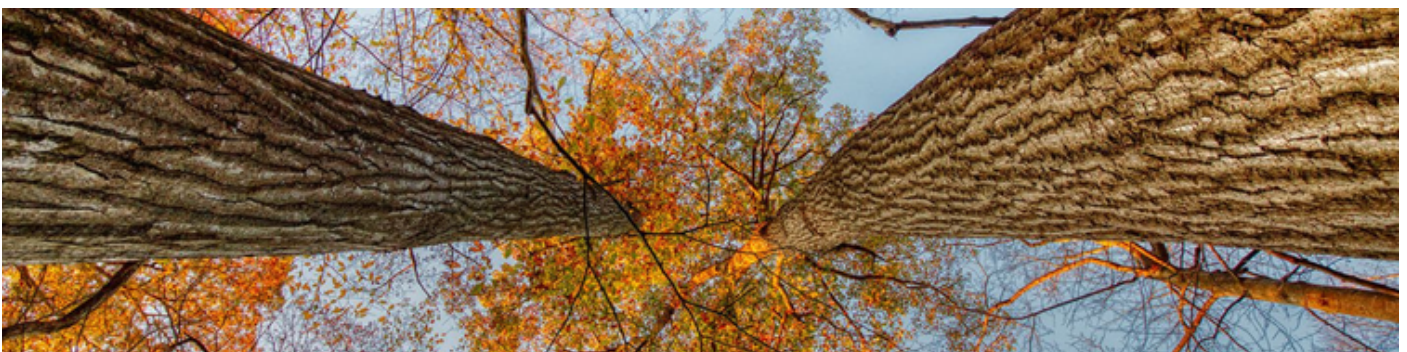
Moving forward, I believe Montgomery County should continue pursuing more sustainable waste reduction, recycling, composting, and disposal strategies that better align with our environmental, climate, and public health goals while protecting surrounding agricultural communities and natural resources.

**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 should move forward with hyperscale data centers at this time. These facilities can place enormous demands on water, energy, land, infrastructure, and surrounding communities, and I do not believe the County has gathered enough information to make a fully informed decision.

Before any consideration of hyperscale data centers, Montgomery County would need a rigorous public review of water use, energy demand, grid capacity, greenhouse gas emissions, noise, backup generator pollution, stormwater impacts, land-use compatibility, and effects on nearby residents, farms, and natural resources. Any zoning standards would need to be extremely strict and should require clear proof that there will be no negative impact on local residents, groundwater, the Potomac River, the Agricultural Reserve, or the broader environment.

At minimum, any proposal would need to meet the highest environmental standards, rely on renewable energy such as solar wherever feasible, include strong water conservation requirements, and be subject to transparent public review before approval. However, based on the information currently available and the County's existing infrastructure and water challenges, I do not support hosting hyperscale data centers in Montgomery County at this time.



**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)**

Forest protection should be a major priority for Montgomery County because forests are essential for climate resilience, clean air and water, biodiversity, stormwater management, and public health. I support strengthening forest conservation efforts, protecting mature tree canopy during development review processes, expanding native planting initiatives, and continuing investments in managing invasive and non-native plant species that damage local ecosystems. As someone with a scientific background, I believe environmental and land-use planning should be grounded in long-term sustainability and data-driven decision-making.

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

I believe Montgomery County should be cautious about expanding synthetic turf fields given ongoing environmental, public health, heat, disposal, and long-term cost concerns associated with these surfaces. The County should carefully evaluate lifecycle costs, replacement expenses, stormwater impacts, heat retention, and potential environmental effects before committing significant public funding to additional synthetic turf projects, especially during a period of budget constraints.



**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)**

Local agriculture and the Agricultural Reserve are critical to Montgomery County's long-term environmental, economic, and community resilience. I support continued efforts to preserve farmland, strengthen the Agricultural Reserve, and explore ways the County can better support local farmers through partnerships, conservation programs, technical assistance, and policies that improve long-term sustainability for agricultural operations.

Agriculture is also personally meaningful to me. My parents grew up on farms in El Salvador, where my father helped raise cows and pigs and my mother helped grow and harvest crops as part of daily life. I volunteer with a local farmers market, and members of my extended family own and operate a farm where we regularly gather to share knowledge about growing food, sustainability, and agriculture across generations.

As grocery costs continue rising, I believe Montgomery County should invest more in community education around local agriculture and food production so future generations of families across the County can build stronger connections to healthy, sustainable, and locally rooted food systems.