

# Montgomery County 2026 Candidate Questionnaire



## Personal Information:

**Name**

Will Jawando

**What Office Are You Seeking in the 2026 Election?**

Montgomery County Executive

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

willjawando.com | @willjawando on social media | info@willjawando.com



**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 grew up in Montgomery County in affordable housing, the son of a Nigerian immigrant father and a white mother from Kansas. I have spent my career fighting for working families, from founding Catholic University's first NAACP chapter, to serving in the Obama White House, to seven years on the County Council where I authored rent stabilization, co-led Maryland's first building decarbonization law, and championed public schools as a father of four kids. I am running for County Executive because I believe in the Montgomery Promise: that everyone, no matter where they come from, should be able to afford to live, learn, and succeed here.

**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?**

I would grade current public engagement on many of these decisions as an F. I do not say that lightly. The problem is not the number of people who fill a room to check a box. It is whether their feedback actually influences the decision-making process. Too often, the current approach is: decide first, hold a hearing

second, and then tell residents they were heard.

The Attainable Housing Strategies process is a perfect example. The Planning Board spent months developing sweeping zoning recommendations that would affect communities across the county. Residents came out in huge numbers to listening sessions and community meetings to express serious concerns. And the feedback did not change the outcome. People could tell their input was not shaping anything. That is why I pushed to stop and rethink the approach.

Real engagement means bringing residents in early, before decisions are baked. It means having their input actually shape what gets proposed, not just reacting to what has already been decided. As County Executive, I will implement participatory budgeting pilots where residents decide how to spend community investment dollars. I will direct my agencies to conduct genuine community engagement before major development and land use decisions move forward.

And yes, I absolutely support re-establishing the Office of the People's Counsel. It is required by law under our county code. I have fought to fund it. Prince George's, Harford, Howard, and Baltimore Counties all have one. Montgomery County residents deserve the same. When developers show up with lawyers, engineers, and consultants, our residents should not have to navigate our zoning code alone.

**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. The way these branches currently interact has to improve. Too often, agencies operate in silos. The Planning Board develops recommendations without adequate coordination with the Council or County Executive's office on implementation capacity, infrastructure needs, or community impact. The Council gets handed finished plans with little room to shape them. And the executive branch does not always communicate a clear vision or hold agencies accountable for following through on what we pass.

As County Executive, I will set a clear vision and make sure every department understands it. I will use my appointment power to put people on boards and commissions who share a commitment to real community engagement and accountability. I will establish regular coordination between my office, the Council, and the Planning Board so we are not working at cross-purposes. And I will hold agencies accountable to our residents with clear metrics and public reporting. One of the things I am most focused on as County Executive is building a real data and performance management system so residents can see whether government is delivering on its promises.



**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?**

This is urgent. The Potomac River was just named the most endangered river in the United States by

American Rivers. And the reason is the combination of aging infrastructure and the unchecked expansion of water-guzzling data centers across our watershed.

In January 2026, the Potomac Interceptor sewer line collapsed in Montgomery County, dumping an estimated 243 to 300 million gallons of raw, untreated sewage directly into the Potomac River. That is one of the largest sewage spills in American history. Bacteria levels near the spill site were thousands of times above safe limits. Three counties issued health advisories. The Justice Department and Maryland's Attorney General have both filed lawsuits against DC Water, and the state's complaint alleges they knew the 60-year-old pipeline showed signs of corrosion and failed to act. This happened in our county. It is a wake-up call about what happens when we let infrastructure age past the point of safety.

For rural residents served by wells drawn from a federally designated Sole Source Aquifer, protection is just as critical. We cannot allow development that compromises groundwater quality. As County Executive, I will ensure that any new development in areas served by wells undergoes rigorous environmental review for groundwater impact. I will push for stronger protections of wellhead areas and buffer zones. And I will coordinate with the state on monitoring and enforcement to make sure what is on paper actually gets implemented in the field.

On the broader water supply question: data centers can consume a million gallons or more of water per day for cooling. Loudoun County alone accounts for up to 8% of total Potomac basin water withdrawals during peak summer months. And these facilities are being approved without any watershed-wide assessment of cumulative impact. Many sit upstream of drinking water intakes serving millions of people.

That is why I introduced Expedited Bill 24-26, a two-year moratorium on data center building permits in Montgomery County. My bill is the only legislation introduced that would actually pause development at the Dickerson site. The other moratorium bill introduced by my colleague only applies to new conditional use applications filed after the bill's effective date. Dickerson already has conditional approval. If you want to stop what is happening at Dickerson, my bill is the one that does it. A two-year pause gives us time to get the standards right on clean energy, water use, wastewater discharge, and community benefit agreements.

I will also prioritize investment in aging water infrastructure, advocate at the state and federal level for reauthorization of critical water infrastructure funding programs before they expire, and push for mandatory water-use transparency and reporting requirements for all large-scale water consumers, including data centers. We cannot plan for a water-constrained future if we do not even know how much water is being consumed.

**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 Ag Reserve is one of Montgomery County's most important assets for climate resilience. It is roughly 93,000 acres, about one-third of the county, and it includes over 540 farms. It is a massive carbon sink and green lung for our region. Protecting it is not separate from our climate strategy. It is central to it. The Reserve absorbs carbon, filters water, reduces heat island effects, and produces local food, which cuts transportation emissions. Healthy farmland managed well is working land that also serves as climate infrastructure. As County Executive, I will defend the Agricultural Reserve boundary and ensure that development pressure, including from data centers, does not encroach on this irreplaceable resource.

On climate funding: yes, I have concrete plans. I co-sponsored the original legislation dedicating 10% of the fuel energy tax to the Green Bank, and I believe we need to increase that percentage over time because success in reducing energy consumption will shrink the revenue base. I support examining our energy tax structure for high-energy consumers like data centers. If a single facility is consuming a million gallons of water a day and drawing massive amounts of electricity, it should be paying its fair share for the environmental cost it imposes on our community and our grid. I also support exploring a dedicated climate resilience bond and ensuring any new development pays for the environmental impact it creates.



**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. The Dickerson community has waited long enough. This incinerator should be closed, and as County Executive I will do everything in my power to get us there.

The people who live near this facility have been bearing the burden of our county's waste for decades. The argument that we cannot close the incinerator because we would just be shipping waste to lower-income communities elsewhere is important, and I have made that argument myself. But it is incomplete. We are already shipping toxic ash from incineration to landfills in low-income Black and Brown communities right now. The status quo is not the environmentally just option. Keeping the incinerator running is not protecting those communities. It is harming this community while harming others as well.

As County Executive, I will push aggressively to make closure a reality on a clear and accountable timeline.

**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?**

Montgomery County should not host hyperscale data centers without the highest environmental, energy, and community standards in place. We do not have those standards today. That is the whole point of my two-year moratorium.

We simply have not gathered all the necessary information to make an informed decision. There has been no watershed-wide assessment of cumulative water impact. There is no requirement for 100% clean energy. There is no enforceable community benefit agreement framework. There are no noise standards, no water discharge requirements, and no transparency mandates specific to data centers. Our zoning code was not designed for facilities of this scale and impact, and we are shoehorning them into categories meant for traditional industrial uses.

My bill would bar the Department of Permitting from issuing building permits for data centers for two years after the moratorium takes effect. That is an important distinction. The other moratorium bill introduced at the Council only applies to new conditional use applications. The Dickerson project already has conditional approval, which means that bill, as written, would not stop it. My bill would, because Dickerson has not received building permits.

When data centers are built without guardrails, without planning, without accountability, without firm commitments around clean energy, they do not serve our community well. The Dickerson site would have emissions comparable to a small city. As I said when I introduced the bill: we do not want to be first, we want to be right. You cannot unbuild these things. If a company will not meet our standards, they can build somewhere else.



**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 climate infrastructure. They absorb carbon, filter air and water, reduce heat islands, manage stormwater, and provide habitat. I voted for our no-net-loss forest conservation legislation and co-sponsored updated tree canopy fee legislation because I take this seriously.

As County Executive, forest protection and invasive species control would be priorities. I would adequately fund the Parks Department and DOT for invasive plant management. Once invasives like mile-a-minute and English ivy take hold, they destroy ecosystems we will never get back. Underfunding means the problem compounds every year. And I would work with the Council to close any loopholes in the Forest Conservation Law that are making it easier to remove mature trees, because a 50-year-old oak provides exponentially more ecological value than a sapling. You cannot cut one down and plant a replacement and call it even.

This is also an equity issue. Lower-income communities and communities of color often have far less tree cover, meaning more extreme heat and worse air quality. Environmental justice means prioritizing canopy expansion where it is needed most, not just where it is easiest.

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

I have not just talked about this issue. I have acted on it. As Chair of the Education and Culture Committee, I led a 2-1 committee vote this budget cycle to reallocate \$34.1 million that MCPS had requested for synthetic turf fields and redirect that funding toward systemic building repairs, including HVAC systems in schools where kids are learning in buildings with broken heating and cooling. I proposed that MCPS use natural grass fields instead.

The evidence on PFAS contamination, microplastic pollution, and heat island effects from synthetic turf continues to mount. These are forever chemicals we are asking children to play on. I understand the playability arguments. Coaches and sports leagues want fields that can be used year-round. I get it. But the precautionary principle should win when children's health is at stake, and we should not be spending tens of millions of dollars on a product with serious unresolved safety questions when our school buildings are falling apart.

I support a moratorium on new synthetic turf installations, including at MCPS facilities, until we have better science and safer 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)**

Modern farmers have to work incredibly hard, navigate bureaucracy, be imaginative, and fight to just keep afloat. I have enormous respect for it.

The challenges you describe are real. When the average age of producers is 59 and the next generation cannot afford access to farmland, we are looking at the potential loss of an agricultural economy that took decades to build. Lease costs are an existential threat.

As County Executive, I would take several concrete steps. First, I will increase funding for our agricultural preservation programs, including the Building Lot Termination program. The BLT program has preserved over 2,200 acres so far, but we need to accelerate. Every lot we retire reduces development pressure on working farms.

Second, I will use the county's purchasing power to support local agriculture. During COVID, we created eight food service hubs around the county that serve seniors and low-income families. Those programs should prioritize local sourcing wherever possible. County facilities and schools should be buying more food from Montgomery County farms. That is both good policy and a way to create stable demand for local producers.

Third, I want to support the next generation of farmers. That means working with the Office of Agriculture on beginning farmer support, incubator farm initiatives, and connecting new and diverse producers to county resources. The Ag Reserve was designed to protect farmland, but protection alone is not enough if the people who want to farm cannot afford to get started. I also want to work with MCPS and programs like Summer RISE, which I co-founded, to expose more young people to the Agricultural Reserve and help them see farming as a real and viable career path. If we want the average age of our producers to come down, we have to start showing the next generation what is so special about this land and what it means to work it. Too many kids growing up in Montgomery County have never set foot on a farm 20 minutes from their school.

Finally, I will work with the state on tax and regulatory reforms that reduce the financial burden on working farms. Agricultural land should be treated as working land, not as land-in-waiting for development. The Agricultural Reserve is one of the most successful farmland preservation programs in America. One of my responsibilities if elected as County Executive is to make sure the farms inside it can actually survive and thrive.