



Montgomery County 2022 Candidate Questionnaire - Brandy Brooks

Personal Information:

Name Brandy Brooks

What Office Are You Seeking in the 2022 Election? County Council At-Large

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 result of a brilliant, foresighted land use decision more than 40 years ago to stop rapid farmland loss in Montgomery County and preserve our rural communities by placing nearly $\frac{1}{3}$ of the County's land area in a rural development transfer zone that restricted density while also providing compensating transfer of development rights to other areas of the county that are more densely developed. The Ag Reserve pushes back against the development trend to consider agricultural and rural land less important than the various "highest and best" uses that have prompted sprawling and unsustainable greenfield development across most of the rest of the country over the past several decades. The Ag Reserve has helped to maintain rural areas as part of the strong diversity of community types across the county; supported the continuation of a healthy agricultural sector as part of the County's economy; and promoted the protection of conservation and recreation areas that benefit all county residents.

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

I strongly support the continued protection of the Ag Reserve. I'm excited to work with the County's existing farmers and producers as well as new farmers and producers in order to support and further develop a thriving, locally-focused agricultural economy that helps to meet the food needs of our county and that builds wealth and security for farmer and farmworker families. I also want to support residents of rural towns and communities to strengthen their town centers as community hubs that provide access to the services and amenities important to all residents, while preserving the broader rural character of their communities. I also want to focus on working with residents and other stakeholders to plan for a highly effective and efficient transportation network, including strong transit service, that makes it easy for residents to get from the Ag Reserve to other parts of the county and region; that facilitates workers and visitors coming to the Ag Reserve to support its economy and get to know this part of the county better; and that protects the health of our environment and builds resiliency in the face of climate change.

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

My first priority is ensuring that we require, both at the state and local level, thorough environmental impact assessments of proposed residential, commercial, and industrial development and proposed

roadway or other transportation construction; and that we establish guidelines for the Council and County government that require those impacts to be adequately addressed before projects can be approved and implemented. My second priority is to ensure that we create an effective transportation network with good alternatives to private automobile use that can enable access to natural resources for more people in the county. As an example from a different part of the country, regular seasonal shuttle service from the commuter rail to Crane's Beach in Ipswich, MA helps to make the sensitive beach ecosystem more accessible for regional visitors while reducing the need for them to drive their own vehicles to get there.

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

I believe that addressing toxic runoff into our groundwater and surface water is one of the most effective ways that the County Council can protect our drinking water supply. This includes continuing to regulate the residential and commercial use of pesticides and other chemicals that run off of yards and farms; ensuring the use of permeable paving, green roofs, and other sustainable stormwater management techniques on County properties; both regulating and incentivizing the use of sustainable stormwater management techniques by private property owners; and ensuring that we invest in maintaining and upgrading stormwater infrastructure across the county. I also support continued funding of the Department of Environmental Protection's watershed monitoring and restoration efforts in order to protect and improve the ecological health of our County's waterways.

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

My first priority is reducing the number of trips in privately owned automobiles through improved and irresistible pedestrian, cycling, public transportation infrastructure, and incentives to retain high levels of telework and alternative work schedules. This includes, as mentioned above, ensuring a strong transportation network for the Ag Reserve, and incentives that reward employees for taking public transportation and employers for supporting public transit and telework. I also support continued free RideOn service.

My second priority is increasing funding and community outreach for programs like the Montgomery County Green Bank to continue to expand access to and use of county programs to increase solar generation and weatherization. I believe that this can include programs for community solar generation in the Ag Reserve. When done in partnership and collaboration with community stakeholders, community solar installations can be an important resource for resilience in the face of climate change. As an example, the community solar program of Casa Pueblo in the rural mountain town of Adjuntas, Puerto Rico, provided an essential survival and recovery resource for residents after Hurricane Maria, and the program has expanded to more than 200 homes and a growing number of local businesses.

My third priority is expanding our stock of income-diverse housing that is affordable for people at every income level near transit, by tying development incentives and rezoning initiatives specifically to the production of large percentages of affordable housing (>50%). I believe this means both ensuring that any residential development permitted in the Upcounty is compact and located close to existing centers of density and ensuring that both existing and new development is adequately supported by public transit access.

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

I believe that the County needs to invest much more heavily in promoting and focusing its procurement on local business based in Montgomery County, and this absolutely includes farm businesses. I want to help strengthen "buy local" programs within the County government, including farm-to-school/farm-to-institution programs. I also want to work with agricultural producers to identify the infrastructure needs that would make it easier for producers to get their products to retail and wholesale outlets across the county and region, and support food entrepreneurs (especially entrepreneurs of color and from immigrant communities) to develop enterprises around those infrastructure needs. As noted

above, I want to work with rural residents in the county to ensure access to amenities and services that support their lives and livelihoods.

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?

In general, I do not support additional roadway construction as the priority for addressing the County's ongoing transportation needs and severe transportation inequities. While some roadway improvements are necessary in order to address the amount of development we've permitted in the Upcounty and to facilitate planned public transportation projects that would benefit the area, our transportation infrastructure focus has to be on reducing vehicle miles traveled. This is critical to address air and water pollution, the demand for energy from fossil fields, the public health impacts of the climate crisis, and overall quality of life for Upcounty residents.

Transportation projects also need to prioritize getting residents around our county, not simply in and out of DC. We need to strengthen our local economy by making it easier for workers and customers from various parts of the county to get to the County's economic centers. Many of the planned BRT projects in the county, including the Corridor Cities Transitway, can make intra-county travel much more efficient. Additionally, we need to continue supporting telework and flex schedules for County government employees and offering incentives to private businesses that also support these options for their workers.

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

Incineration is an unsustainable and toxic form of waste management for our county, and we must transition away from it. To make the transition to sustainable waste management, I want us to transition the Dickerson incinerator to a commercial composting facility, as well as expanding and improving the capacity of our recycling facilities in the county (including the capacity to handle electronic waste, which makes up a growing part of our waste stream). We should view this transition as an important economic opportunity, both to make Montgomery County a regional leader in sustainable waste management and to provide family-sustaining employment and entrepreneurship opportunities for county residents, especially those who have worked in toxic industries and those who have historically been marginalized and relegated to low-wage work without good benefits or the opportunity to build wealth for their families.

I'm a strong supporter of waste reduction and zero waste strategies like recycling, upcycling, and composting. However, in order to support people to use these strategies, we have to make sure that the infrastructure to do so is accessible to them. I'm especially interested in working with landlords and tenants in multifamily properties to make sure residents have easy access to both recycling and composting services and that both residents and property managers have access to education and technical assistance around sustainable waste management, including addressing pest control concerns. As part of building composting capacity in the county, I also support the development of community-based composting business and partnerships with local farms. I want to continue supporting and expanding the County's Commercial Food Scraps Recycling Program; with proper infrastructure support and technical assistance for commercial entities, I would support a commercial food waste diversion mandate similar to legislation passed last year in DC.

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

I am in agreement with many of the principles of Thrive 2050, which include corridor-focused growth and the aspiration of complete communities that allow all of our residents to easily access critical services, employment opportunities, and amenities. Thrive 2050 also acknowledges the need to use a racial equity and social justice lens and the need to examine important concepts like social and cooperative housing. As our County grows, we need to ensure that growth is dense, compact, pedestrian- and transit-oriented, and offers opportunities for people of every background and income level.

As important as what Thrive mentions is what Thrive 2050 does not address. A new County General Plan offers an opportunity to clearly outline the scale of action required to address the affordability crisis faced by too many families in our County. In almost every section of both the Planning Board and PHED Committee drafts of Thrive, the document lacks specificity about the County's goals, key actions, evaluation metrics, or how the plan will address the specific needs and concerns of key stakeholders, including housing insecure or cost-burdened residents, seniors, small business owners, economically disadvantaged workers, or arts and culture practitioners - just a few of the groups that would have direct and specific interest in some of the topical chapters named in the plan. On the environmental front, Thrive leaves serious discussion of the measures needed to address climate change to the Climate Action Plan, only tangentially referring to it rather than reflecting a deep integration of thinking across the two documents, and reducing the complexities of conservation, recreation, and agricultural land use to a section on parks and recreation. Lastly, while acknowledging racial equity and social justice in a plan is a necessary step towards justice for every community, achieving equity and justice requires intentional and specific action by County leaders, and the plan does not rigorously analyze or give guidance around how its recommendations will concretely address past injustices and ensure equity going forward.

I believe that these failures in the Thrive 2050 drafts are a direct result of a planning process that did not meaningfully engage the vast majority of county residents and stakeholders. While Thrive proponents like to tout the number of "engagement" activities, most of these were not serious, in-depth opportunities for community members to craft the future vision for our county or identify and make decisions about the priorities that should be addressed in the plan. Additionally, all but the first portion of the Thrive process was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic - when many of the most vulnerable and marginalized members of our communities whose needs must be addressed by a land use plan were facing the severe illness, death, and the loss of their jobs and homes. Claiming to have done adequate engagement during a time when so many community members were in deep crisis and had virtually no capacity to participate is extraordinarily disrespectful to residents who in many cases are still trying to recover from the impacts of the past two years.

I support the call of community organizers of color and their allies for a truly just and inclusive planning process that will thoroughly address and advance our communities' needs (<https://bit.ly/PlanningJustice>), which would require a minimum of 12 to 18 months using best practices in participatory planning. I have been both a designer and a community member participating in such processes, so I know that they can be done and done well. I also know the quality of community buy-in and clarity of guidance that a good land use plan can give to community members as they seek to shape their future, and I believe Montgomery County residents and stakeholders deserve a general plan that is worthy of our amazing places and amazing people.

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 is room for tremendous improvement in the way that local and state government officials and entities interact with the public. I am a strong proponent and experienced practitioner of participatory policy-making, as described at <https://www.wepowerpolicy.org/>. Participatory policy-making fundamentally shifts the dynamics of power in the crafting of legislation and regulations - who frames the problem and the agenda? Who determines what's important and needs to be prioritized? Who decides what should happen? Who receives the tangible benefits that the policy produces, including economic benefits?

I am committed to engaging community members at the decision-making table, not just the listening table or the questions and concerns table. I believe that community members must be centered as we define the problems our communities are facing, prioritize and set our legislative agenda, develop legislation, monitor implementation, and evaluate the results. I am also committed to centering the voices of people of color, immigrants, poor and working people, LGBTQIA+ people, women, seniors, and young people - those who are often missing or marginalized at the decision-making table, but who

are most directly and severely affected by the issues the County Council addresses.

This type of process empowers residents to have a stronger voice and more understanding and ownership of the policies that impact their lives. I also believe this creates greater accountability and transparency for public officials and elected leaders, because policy-making is no longer a black box where stakeholders have to guess what's likely to come out and whether it will meet their needs. Ultimately, I believe participatory policy-making creates a partnership model of governance that strengthens our democracy, because community members are clear about their stake and their role in our policy and politics, and they can see that their participation is meaningful, valued, and supported.