



Montgomery County 2022 Candidate Questionnaire - Fatmata Barrie

Personal Information:

Name Fatmata Barrie

What Office Are You Seeking in the 2022 Election? Montgomery County Council District 5

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?

Simply, the Ag Reserve (Agricultural Reserve) is a land area of Montgomery County used primarily for agricultural purposes such as farming. However in Maryland it is much more formalized. The 1964 General Plan preserved certain tracks of land around population centers identified for "low-density residential uses, open space and protected farmland". In 1980, the Montgomery County Council made a generational land-use decision to create the "Agricultural Reserve" encompassing 93,000 acres of the county's land resources designed to protect over 500 farms, associated land, and their production. The Ag Reserve is overseen by the Office of Agriculture. The Ag Reserve is an important part of the economy in Montgomery County and still has much more potential within the charter of land-use preservation and sustainability. It also provides a wonderful array of family recreation and educational activities.

Also, the Ag Reserve provides opportunities for small farmers to thrive. As an African immigrant who knows at least one African immigrant farmer who has benefited from the Ag Reserve programs, the Ag Reserve is important because it opens the door for immigrant families. It provides an opportunity for those who cannot afford to lease land space to fulfill their dream of being farmers. It provides an opportunity for fresh foods at a local level.

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

I believe the Ag Reserve should be preserved and the County should continue to identify appropriate uses for this valuable resource. Furthermore, the County Council should resist and conduct detailed oversight of any proposals that might alter the land-use designation. I am running on a platform of equity and inclusion. My vision for the Ag Reserve is from the perspective of poverty, including the working poor, the underserved, and food insecurity in District 5. We need to do a better job connecting our underserved and underprivileged communities with nutritional food options. I will work to increase access to fresh foods and shorten the food supply chain from farm to community. This includes small business and entrepreneurial opportunities within impacted neighborhoods. I would love to work with the small farmers to bring healthy foods to our District, especially since we have low access.

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

Responsible stewardship of public lands lies in the hands of the County Council and County Executive working collaboratively with residents and nonprofit organizations. I believe that the majority sentiment among county residents aligns with my belief that the Ag Reserve should be preserved and not chipped away by seemingly attractive commercial proposals. Therefore, the County government, as responsible stewards, should make smart choices with the goal of preserving and enhancing the Ag Reserve.

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

Safe drinking water is crucial for all communities, especially for our District 5 residents. When elected, I will evaluate the current status of our drinking water supply through an equity and inclusion lens, ensuring that current and future policies and decisions take into consideration the impact on District 5, particularly the underserved. I see my role as someone who will bring to the table all stakeholders to ensure we are purposeful in how we ensure safety. I would like to have detailed discussions about process and accountability.

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

Climate change is an environmental justice issue because certain groups of people are disproportionately affected by climate change and are less able than others to adapt to or recover from climate change impacts. These groups include people of color, low-income communities, immigrants, and people who are not fluent in English. There are many factors that can affect someone's ability to prepare for, respond to, and cope with the impacts of climate change. Climate change is a local issue that has global impact since we all share the earth, water, and air. Pollution undermines the basic building blocks of life and is strongly linked to poverty. Preservation of the Ag Reserve will help mitigate the impact of the detrimental effects of climate change. On the Council, I will work to provide the availability of information and resources in a person's native language, so they are informed about environmental consequences; and make sure pollution issues associated with economic growth are high priorities.

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

Per my responses to other relevant inquiries, I propose supporting and creating programs to shorten the supply chain by incentivizing the food sources closest to where they are needed – the local farmers and small food service entrepreneurs, including the expansion of the Farm to Food Bank program. Also, increasing the number of local food pantries and locating them in underserved areas and supporting those we already have here in the East County. This will increase the demand for local produce and stock food pantries with nutritious canned options that are out of season. The county should incentivize and train local kitchens at community centers, churches, and food pantries in preservation techniques. We should engage our young people, many of whom are interested in healthy and sustainable food choices. And, finally, the county should consider increasing their buying power by coordinating volume purchases to distribute to food access points across the county.

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?

Although I acknowledge there are instances where new highway construction might be needed, relieving construction is not a long term solution. The smart long term plan to relieve congestion should be to get cars off the road by providing more environmentally efficient (electrification), safe, and accessible public transportation and to improve pedestrian mobility. Therefore, for this reason, and from the perspective of the environmental impact from pollution, I do not support large transportation projects through the Ag Reserve. And, quite frankly, projects such as the widening of I-270 do not necessarily benefit the commuters and residents of East County.

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

recycling play?

The efficacy of the County's recycling programs need to be evaluated, and a long term plan should be re-visited. It should not only be about what and how we are recycling, but about a plan to reduce waste at the front end. This includes resident education on the environmental impact of non-recyclables, as well as the life cycle of recyclable materials. We also need more initiatives to manage non-recyclables coming into the county by using incentives for both sellers and buyers to use environmentally friendly products and containers. Incineration should be reduced, while increasing recycling and composting. More and more residents are using composting services that contribute to a clean, sustainable, closed-loop food system. Farmers should be incentivized to use compost generated in the communities that they serve to generate more food products for these same communities. This is what I mean by a "closed-loop food system".

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

Thrive Montgomery 2050 aims to increase infill development, build communities around Parks, build racial equity, and ensure our local government is working towards a unified common goal. I support any plan that aims for equity, and I pledge to work to ensure the implementation is inclusive and effective. However, I also believe that the Thrive 2050 amendment to the General Plan is both misdirected and misunderstood. There hasn't been adequate public input, partly due to the lack of availability of open forums and more importantly the lack of understanding of what Thrive is proposing. Until the planning department establishes a more transparent process and strives to educate the resident stakeholders whose future will be impacted, Thrive Montgomery 2050 should be put on hold. Then once it is on track with inclusive buy-in from all the stakeholders, then economic development in the area should be accelerated to keep up with the population growth. On the council, I will ensure that Thrive 2050 is appropriately re-assessed, communicated to all the stakeholders, modified if needed with an accelerated timeline, has regular oversight, and most importantly, addresses the concerns put forth in the Office of Legislative Oversight (OLO) report on Racial Equity and Social Justice (RESJ).

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?

One word - "transparency"! The County Council provides opportunities for interested residents to speak at hearings and open most meetings to the public. However, we can always improve transparency, such as making public the council member's voting records, etc. Also, many county residents are busy living their lives, working, raising families and don't have the time, access, or information about public council hearings. Councilmembers need to spend more time reaching into the community, especially areas of the county who have been left behind. When on the council, I will propose that each council member have a process in place to go out into their communities on a regular basis. Many of my neighbors in White Oak do not have access to the internet and as such, having periodic visits into the communities and/or town hall meetings in the communities would provide access for our community members. I have also proposed a policy to create a formal "network of ambassadors" to interface between the council and county agencies and the community groups, particularly those with language and cultural barriers that have kept them from being involved in decisions that impact them. On the state level, residents should be allowed to testify virtually as well as in-person to allow disabled and other vulnerable residents to take advantage of the process.