

2026 County Council Candidate Questionnaire



Smart Growth/the URDL

Established in 1967, the Urban-Rural Demarcation Line (URDL) is a smart growth tool used by planners to prevent sprawl and protect agricultural and environmentally sensitive lands in Baltimore County. As of 2023, about 90% of the county's population lives within the URDL¹.

1. What is your position on maintaining the integrity of the URDL?

Mandy Rimmell, District 1

I strongly support maintaining the integrity of the Urban-Rural Demarcation Line (URDL). It is one of Baltimore County's most important smart growth tools for protecting farmland, forests, wildlife habitat, and the natural systems that sustain our quality of life. By directing growth inward, the URDL helps preserve the agricultural economy, protect tree canopy, safeguard stream buffers, and maintain the ecological balance that keeps our air and water clean. Protecting the URDL also means protecting the long-term viability of farming in Baltimore County, supporting family farms, and ensuring that future generations can continue to work and live on the land that defines our county's identity. At the same time, we must recognize that land-use decisions have not always impacted all communities equally, and we should be mindful that smart growth policy must be implemented in a way that supports reinvestment where it is needed most. But the core principle remains clear: we should not weaken the URDL. Instead, we should strengthen it by pairing strong land preservation policies with thoughtful reinvestment inside and outside the URDL so we can grow responsibly without losing the farms, forests, and open space that make Baltimore County unique.

N. Westcott V, District 1

The URDL was created in 1967 Master Plan 2030 approved in 2024 pretty much preserves it. I'm in favor of maintaining it. Because developers place significant "dollar pressure" on the pockets of County Council members I would like to see Baltimore County move away from private developers whose primary motivation is profit, to a public developer model following examples set by Montgomery County, MD and other large population areas. With the county as its own developer the council can focus on redeveloping existing populated areas. Thereby, maintaining the integrity of the URDL.

Lawrence Williams, District 2

I support smart, responsible growth that aligns with the goals of the Baltimore County Master Plan 2030 by focusing development where infrastructure already exists while protecting farmland and open space outside the URDL. We should revitalize existing commercial corridors, support small businesses, and preserve agricultural land that strengthens our economy, environment, and quality of life.

¹ "Growth Framework," Baltimore County Department of Planning, 2023, https://www.baltimorecountymd.gov/files/Documents/Planning/HUB/Master%20Plan%202030/GrowthFramework_Draft.pdf.

What is your position on maintaining the integrity of the URDL?

Regg Hatcher Jr., District 3

The Urban-Rural Demarcation Line, or URDL, is essentially a "boundary line" that Baltimore County drew back in 1967 to control where building happens. Think of it as a protective ring: inside the line, we have the "Urban" areas where we build houses, shops, and offices because the infrastructure like public water and sewer pipes already exists. Outside the line is the "Rural" area, which is reserved for farms, forests, and nature. As of today, about 90% of our neighbors live inside this line, which has helped keep two-thirds of our county beautiful and green rather than letting it turn into endless suburban sprawl. My position is that we must protect the integrity of the URDL by following a "Build Up, Not Out" strategy. As an engineer with 20 years of experience, I look at the county like a giant machine; it is much more efficient and cheaper for taxpayers to maintain and upgrade the pipes, roads, and bridges we already have inside the line than it is to build miles of new ones into the countryside. Extending these services into rural areas costs a fortune and eventually leads to higher taxes for everyone. By keeping the line exactly where it is, we focus our energy on modernizing our current neighborhoods and making them better places to live. This approach also supports "Smart Growth," which means we should revitalize our existing shopping plazas and commercial areas within the URDL. Instead of cutting into farmland, we can turn older, underused areas into vibrant hubs with new housing and businesses located near transit. This protects our environment and local food sources while also creating tech and STEM opportunities right in our backyard. Protecting the URDL isn't just about saving trees—it's about being smart with our money and building a modern, sustainable Baltimore County for the next generation.

Tyrod Haynes, District 3

The Urban–Rural Demarcation Line (URDL) is one of the most important planning tools Baltimore County has, and I support maintaining its integrity as a firm boundary—not a flexible guideline. The URDL works because it creates clarity: it directs growth into areas with existing infrastructure while preserving rural communities, farmland, and environmentally sensitive land outside the line. Weakening it—through piecemeal exceptions or politically driven expansions—undermines decades of smart growth policy and ultimately drives up long-term costs for taxpayers. My position is grounded in three principles: 1) Protect what the URDL was designed to protect. The rural areas outside the line are not “undeveloped opportunities”—they are essential assets. They support agriculture, preserve open space, and safeguard watersheds that directly impact our environmental health. Once that land is lost to sprawl, it is gone permanently. 2) Focus growth where it makes sense. With roughly 90% of residents already living inside the URDL, the priority should be redevelopment, reinvestment, and smarter land use within the boundary. That means revitalizing aging commercial corridors, encouraging mixed-use development, and ensuring infrastructure keeps pace with growth. 3) Demand discipline and transparency in land-use decisions. Any discussion about modifying the URDL must meet a high, evidence-based threshold—not short-term political or development pressure. Residents deserve confidence that land-use decisions are made strategically, not opportunistically. In practical terms, I do not support routine expansion of the URDL. If anything, we should be strengthening policies that reinforce it—aligning zoning, transportation, and economic development strategies to make growth inside the line more sustainable and equitable. Put simply: The URDL is not just a line on a map—it's a commitment to responsible growth, fiscal discipline, and preserving the character of Baltimore County for future generations.

Makeda Scott, District 3

I strongly support maintaining the integrity of the Urban-Rural Demarcation Line (URDL) as a critical tool for protecting Baltimore County's rural landscapes, agricultural resources, and environmental health. Preserving the URDL ensures we prevent unchecked sprawl and the costly expansion of infrastructure into rural areas. At the same time, we must be intentional about how we grow within the URDL. That means prioritizing smart, sustainable redevelopment, not development for development's sake. We should invest in revitalizing existing communities, incorporating green

What is your position on maintaining the integrity of the URDL?

space, and ensuring that growth enhances quality of life for current residents while protecting our natural assets for future generations.

Nino Mangione, District 5

I will not support moving the URDL. Additionally, I will be actively supporting the ballot referendum this fall to make it more difficult to move the URDL.

Shawn McIntosh, District 5

My position on the URDL is very clear: I strongly support maintaining its integrity and believe it remains one of the most important tools we have to protect Baltimore County's rural communities, farmland, natural resources, drinking water, and overall quality of life. The URDL was created to prevent sprawl and ensure that growth happens in areas with the infrastructure to support it. When we weaken or chip away at those boundaries, we risk losing the very things that make our communities special while also creating costly infrastructure and service challenges for taxpayers. We also put the source of much of our drinking water at greater risk by increasing development pressure in environmentally sensitive areas that help protect our reservoirs and waterways. That doesn't mean I'm opposed to growth. Baltimore County needs thoughtful, well-planned growth and redevelopment. But growth should happen in appropriate areas, with meaningful community input, adequate infrastructure, and a long-term vision for sustainability. We should be focusing on revitalization, redevelopment, transit-oriented development, and mixed-use communities where services already exist, rather than pushing sprawling development into our rural areas. Protecting the URDL is not just about land use. It's about responsible planning, fiscal sustainability, environmental stewardship, public health, and preserving the character of our communities for future generations.

David Marks, District 7

I proudly sponsored Question A, the charter change that will appear on the 2026 general election ballot. If approved, Question A will require a supermajority of the Baltimore County Council to modify the Urban Rural Demarcation Line. After introducing the legislation, I organized support from key stakeholders, including land preservation and agricultural groups, and helped deliver a 5-to-2 bipartisan majority that will allow voters to decide this important initiative. For more than two decades, I've championed measures that strengthen land preservation in Baltimore County. I'm not new to this issue. The integrity of the Urban-Rural Demarcation Line should command bipartisan support from every elected official in Baltimore County.

Cari Santiago, District 7

The Baltimore County URDL isn't going anywhere; the Department of Planning uses it as their standard and it is widely supported by constituents. While I support Bill 19-25 (County Charter – Baltimore County Farmland Preservation Act) as it was amended, I am strongly opposed to how it was initially introduced: with the codification of 'Councilmanic Courtesy' and allowing what is akin to veto power to individual districts. Councilmanic Courtesy is the unwritten practice where the full Council defers to a single member's opinion on land-use in their district. If a representative can't support legislation with merit instead of courtesy, why would we, as a County, support it?

Crystal Cody, District 8

The URDL protects the very reasons people move to Baltimore County — suburban neighborhoods, rural edges, and waterfront communities. District 8 is almost entirely inside the URDL, with only the far eastern edges of Chase and protected marshlands lying outside it. The URDL boundary on our side runs north of US-40 through Rosedale, around

What is your position on maintaining the integrity of the URDL?

White Marsh, and west of the Gunpowder and Back Rivers. Protecting the URDL does not mean we run out of space, it means we must use the land inside it more intelligently. Holding the line ensures we don't overwhelm our coastal infrastructure while directing smart growth to established commercial corridors.

Josh Sines, District 8

I strongly support maintaining the integrity of the Urban-Rural Demarcation Line. It is one of the most important tools we have to prevent sprawl, protect rural areas, and ensure growth is directed where infrastructure already exists. Once that line is weakened, it is very difficult to restore. We need to hold it.

Tim Fazenbaker, District 9

The URDL has served as a tool to guide growth since 1967, and I support smart planning that prevents uncontrolled sprawl while directing development to areas with existing infrastructure. However, rigid adherence without flexibility ignores real pressures like housing shortages and economic needs in Baltimore County. I favor reviewing and updating the line where data shows clear benefits for residents—such as targeted infill or redevelopment—rather than treating it as untouchable dogma. Local elected officials, not outside coalitions, should have the primary say in balancing growth with preservation.

Russ Mirabile, District 9

Positive, 100%.

2. Do you believe that Baltimore County should dedicate resources to support land preservation and neighborhood parks, both inside and outside the URDL?

Mandy Rimmell, District 1

Yes! Absolutely. Land preservation and access to green space are essential infrastructure for all communities across Baltimore County. Baltimore County's continued investment in programs like the Rural Legacy Program, Agricultural Preservation Program, Baltimore County Land Trust Coalition, and NeighborSpace of Baltimore County is critical to permanently protecting land and expanding public access to nature. Inside the URDL, we must also prioritize neighborhood parks, trails, and tree canopy expansion—especially in communities that have historically lacked access to green space. Outside the URDL, preservation protects our farms, watersheds, and rural character. Environmental justice and public health demand that green space be accessible to all residents, not just those near preserved rural land.

N. Westcott V, District 1

Yes. You asked a closed ended question. There is no need to give a drawn out "Meet the Press," Face the Nation" answer. It's a plain direct, "Yes."

Lawrence Williams, District 2

Yes. Land preservation and neighborhood parks support public health, environmental protection, quality of life, and responsible growth. In District 2, residents are raising concerns about tree canopy reduction, deer overpopulation, recycling, and the continued loss of green space. Along the Liberty Road corridor, zoning challenges and industrial

Do you believe that Baltimore County should dedicate resources to support land preservation and neighborhood parks, both inside and outside the URDL?

blight have also disproportionately impacted communities of color. Residents want fairness in planning and a real voice in decisions that affect their neighborhoods. They want equal access to clean air, green space, healthy food, safe communities, and economic opportunity. We must balance redevelopment with environmental stewardship and smart growth that benefits existing residents while protecting the character, sustainability, and quality of life of our communities.

Regg Hatcher Jr., District 3

I definitely believe we should put resources into both preserving our land and improving our neighborhood parks, whether they are in the city or out in the country. To me, it's all about balance. Outside the URDL, we need to protect our farms and forests. Once that land is developed into a parking lot or a housing complex, you can never get it back. Preserving that land keeps our air and water clean and ensures we still have local places to grow food. Inside the URDL, where most of us live, neighborhood parks are just as important. For families in more crowded areas, a local park is like a shared "backyard." It's where kids play, neighbors meet, and people go to exercise. As an engineer, I also see parks as part of our "green infrastructure"—they help soak up rainwater and keep our neighborhoods from getting too hot in the summer. Investing in these spaces makes our communities safer and increases our property values. Whether it's protecting a massive farm or fixing up a local playground, these resources are an investment in our quality of life. I want to make sure that no matter where you live in Baltimore County, you have access to clean air, green space, and a safe place to go outside.

Tyrod Haynes, District 3

Yes—Baltimore County should actively dedicate resources to land preservation and neighborhood parks both inside and outside the URDL. Treating this as optional or secondary would be a strategic mistake; it's core infrastructure for public health, environmental resilience, and long-term fiscal stability. The Urban-Rural Demarcation Line (URDL) creates two different—but equally important—planning priorities, and our investments should reflect that balance. Most residents live inside the line, which means park access is a matter of equity. Many communities—especially denser and historically underserved neighborhoods—lack safe, well-maintained green space. We should be expanding neighborhood parks and recreation facilities, upgrading aging playgrounds, fields, and community spaces, prioritizing “park deserts” so every resident has access within walking distance, and integrating green infrastructure (tree canopy, stormwater management) into park design. This isn't just about recreation—it's about reducing heat islands, improving mental health, and strengthening communities. Beyond the line, the priority shifts to land conservation and agricultural preservation. That includes funding easement programs to protect farmland from development pressure, preserving forests and watersheds that protect drinking water and ecosystems, and supporting rural economies tied to agriculture and open space. If we fail here, we don't just lose land—we lose a defining part of Baltimore County's identity. This requires a disciplined, multi-pronged approach: dedicated capital funding in the county budget, leveraging state and federal conservation programs, public-private partnerships and land trusts, and developer impact fees that directly support park creation and maintenance. Bottom line: Investing in parks and preservation is not a luxury—it's preventive policy. It reduces future infrastructure costs, protects property values, and improves quality of life across the county. Strong communities inside the URDL and protected landscapes outside it—that's how you make smart growth actually work.

Makeda Scott, District 3

Yes. Baltimore County should make sustained, strategic investments in land preservation and neighborhood parks both inside and outside the URDL. Protecting open space, farmland, and natural resources is essential to our environmental sustainability, public health, and long-term economic stability. Equally important is ensuring that

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residents, regardless of where they live, have access to safe, well-maintained parks and green spaces. These spaces strengthen communities, support mental and physical health, and contribute to overall quality of life. This is an area where thoughtful public investment delivers long-term returns.

Nino Mangione, District 5

I believe so. I think that monies should be available for this and in conjunction with our overall budget.

Shawn McIntosh, District 5

Yes, absolutely. I believe Baltimore County should continue to dedicate resources to both land preservation and neighborhood parks, both inside and outside the URDL, because these investments directly impact quality of life, public health, environmental sustainability, and community well-being. Land preservation is essential to protecting farmland, forests, waterways, wildlife habitat, and the natural areas that help safeguard our drinking water and reduce flooding and runoff. Preserving open space also helps maintain the rural character of our communities and prevents costly sprawl-related infrastructure demands. At the same time, neighborhood parks and accessible green spaces inside the URDL are equally important. Residents in more densely developed communities deserve safe, well-maintained parks, trails, playgrounds, and recreational spaces close to where they live. Parks improve physical and mental health, strengthen community connections, support children and families, and make communities more attractive places to live. This should not be viewed as an either/or issue. Baltimore County needs a balanced approach that protects our rural landscapes while also investing in vibrant, healthy communities throughout the County. As we grow and redevelop, we must ensure that preservation, recreation, and access to green space remain central parts of our long-term planning.

David Marks, District 7

Absolutely—my record demonstrates my commitment to land preservation and neighborhood parks. Since 2010, I've helped advance more than a dozen new parks in communities that I represent, including three in Towson, seven in Perry Hall and White Marsh, one in Middle River, and the first new park along the Loch Raven Boulevard corridor in a half-century. We blocked development at the former C.P. Crane property, preserving more than 80 acres along Baltimore County's waterfront. We worked with NeighborSpace of Baltimore County to open Ridgely Manor Park and Adelaide Bentley Park. In 2024, I passed legislation that converted unused Baltimore County property into new parks in northeastern Baltimore County. In 2017, the Gunpowder Valley Conservancy named me one of its "Heroes of the Green," and I was awarded the Green Jacket Award by NeighborSpace of Baltimore County in 2018.

Cari Santiago, District 7

Absolutely. Nature provides a serenity that is essential for community wellbeing. Whether it is a vast rural tract or an urban "Pocket Park," we need green spaces where residents can reconnect and deepen their roots. However, creation is only half the battle; we need sustainable management plans. For example, converting a stormwater management area into a park shifts the maintenance burden from Public Works to Recreation and Parks. We must advocate for clear MOUs (Memorandums of Understanding) to ensure we don't overburden the departments and areas we are trying to protect.

Crystal Cody, District 8

Yes. Investment in parks is a quality-of-life priority. While conservation easements protect the Gunpowder watershed we also invest in urban green space and waterfront access within District 8. Whether it's preserving passive open

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space, upgrading community parks, or securing better public recreational water access along the Back River and Middle River necks, parks mitigate localized flooding, reduce the heat island effect, and ensure dense communities have quality outdoor recreation.

Josh Sines, District 8

Yes. This is a core function of local government. We should be investing in land preservation, protecting open space, and making sure communities have access to parks. That includes both inside the URDL, where redevelopment is occurring, and outside it, where preservation is critical.

Tim Fazenbaker, District 9

Yes, but resources must be prioritized based on clear public benefit and taxpayer return. Neighborhood parks inside the URDL serve dense communities and should be maintained or expanded where needed for quality of life. Outside the line, focus on protecting key natural assets like waterways (e.g., Gunpowder River) that provide drinking water for millions. I support voluntary, incentive-based preservation over heavy-handed mandates or excessive spending that raises taxes without delivering results for working families in districts like mine.

Russ Mirabile, District 9

Most definitely and if elected, I would vote for preservation and funding.

3. How would you promote redevelopment within the URDL to help ease the housing shortage?

Mandy Rimmell, District 1

As the next Councilwoman, I believe we must take a smart, responsible, and highly targeted approach to addressing Baltimore County's housing shortage by focusing on redevelopment within the URDL rather than expanding outward into farmland and open space. A key opportunity we cannot overlook is Baltimore County's vacant property registry and the significant number of abandoned, underutilized, and deteriorating properties that already exist within our communities. We should be taking a closer, more coordinated look at how these properties can be brought back into productive use—whether through rehabilitation, adaptive reuse, or strategic redevelopment partnerships. These sites represent both a challenge and an opportunity: to remove blight, strengthen neighborhoods, and increase housing supply without expanding our development footprint. This approach includes revitalizing underutilized commercial corridors and aging strip malls, encouraging mixed-use development near transit and job centers, streamlining permitting for infill housing that fits community context, prioritizing workforce and affordable housing near existing infrastructure, and actively leveraging the vacant property registry in Baltimore County to identify and transform abandoned and deteriorated properties into housing, community assets, or productive redevelopment sites. We can and must have growth to sustain our tax base, but growth should be strategic. It should not come at the expense of our underserved communities, farmland, forests, or open space. By focusing on reclaiming vacant and blighted properties, we can meet housing needs, strengthen neighborhoods, reduce sprawl, and protect the natural resources that define Baltimore County's character and future.

N. Westcott V, District 1

The county needs to become its own developer. Eliminating required 10-20% profit developer seek that can give no consideration to the history and character of existing and neighboring communities. The county can then reinvest its

How would you promote redevelopment within the URDL to help ease the housing shortage?

more modest profit back into future projects or reduced purchase costs for its for-sale developments. A public developer model will allow the county to pursue the greater good in providing homeownership to middle income groups (like teachers; firefighters) that make too much to qualify for many government programs but otherwise cannot afford to buy. Including business spaces in residential projects could also support the startup, sustainability and expansion of small business by again reinvesting its profits into reduced rate storefront rents.

Lawrence Williams, District 2

Baltimore County has taken steps on housing, but we need to make those efforts work better and faster for residents. Right now, programs addressing vacant properties, home rehabilitation, workforce training, and development are too fragmented. I support creating a clear vacant-to-homeownership pipeline that moves homes from vacant, to renovated, to owned. My focus is pairing home rehabilitation with paid apprenticeships in the skilled trades so residents can earn while they learn, build careers, and potentially purchase the homes they help restore. I also support energy-efficient upgrades because affordability is not just about getting into a home, it is about being able to stay in it.

Regg Hatcher Jr., District 3

To ease the housing shortage, I believe we need to focus on what I call "Smart Redevelopment." This means looking at the land we've already used—like old, half empty shopping centers or vacant office buildings—and turning them into modern communities. As an engineer, I see this as a way to fix two problems at once. First, it helps the housing shortage by creating new apartments and townhomes in places where people actually want to live. Second, it cleans up run-down areas without having to build on our farms or forests. By building "up" instead of "out," we can put housing near bus lines and shops, which makes life easier for people who don't want to spend hours in traffic. To make this happen, I would push for a few specific things: 1) Faster Permitting: I want to cut through the "red tape" and bureaucracy. If a builder wants to turn a crumbling parking lot into affordable housing, the county should make that process quick and efficient. 2) Incentives for STEM and Mixed-Use: I want to encourage buildings that have shops or tech spaces on the bottom floor and apartments on the top. This creates jobs and housing in the same spot. 3) Modernizing Utilities: Since I have 20 years of experience with infrastructure, I know that some of our older areas need better water and sewer lines to handle new residents. I would prioritize upgrading these systems so we can support more housing inside the URDL. Essentially, I want to take the "underused" parts of our county and give them a second life. This keeps our neighborhoods vibrant, provides homes for our workers and graduates, and protects our rural land all at the same time.

Tyrod Haynes, District 3

To ease the housing shortage, redevelopment inside the Urban-Rural Demarcation Line (URDL) has to be intentional, accelerated, and community-aligned. The issue isn't land scarcity—it's that too much land inside the boundary is underutilized or locked behind outdated policy. Here's how I would move this from concept to execution: 1) Unlock underutilized land and corridors. We have aging shopping centers, vacant office buildings, and low-density commercial corridors that are prime for transformation. I would target these sites for mixed-use redevelopment (housing + retail + services), promote transit-oriented development near major corridors and transit routes, and incentivize adaptive reuse of obsolete office and retail space into housing. This approach adds housing without expanding the footprint of the county. 2) Modernize zoning to match today's housing needs. The current zoning framework often reflects a 1970s development model. That mismatch is a bottleneck. I would allow missing middle housing (duplexes, triplexes, townhomes) in appropriate areas, increase density where infrastructure already exists, and reduce unnecessary barriers like excessive parking minimums near transit. This is about smart density, not

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overdevelopment. 3) Streamline the approval process. Time is a hidden cost in housing. Delays kill projects or make them unaffordable. I would create predictable, time-bound permitting processes, establish a “fast-track” lane for projects that meet affordability and smart-growth goals, and increase transparency so communities and developers both understand timelines and expectations. 4) Tie incentives directly to affordability. Redevelopment must produce housing people can actually afford—not just market-rate units. I would expand inclusionary housing policies so new developments include affordable units, offer density bonuses and tax incentives tied to workforce and affordable housing, and partner with nonprofits and mission-driven developers to deliver mixed-income communities 5) Invest in infrastructure that supports growth. Redevelopment only works if infrastructure keeps up. That means upgrading water, sewer, and stormwater systems, improving transportation access and walkability, and expanding schools and public safety capacity where needed. Growth should be aligned—not reactive. 6) Engage communities early—and meaningfully. Redevelopment fails when it’s done to communities instead of with them. I would require early-stage community input before plans are finalized, ensure developments include community benefits (green space, retail, services), and balance growth with neighborhood character and livability. Bottom line: We don’t need to sprawl outward—we need to build smarter inward. If we align zoning, incentives, infrastructure, and community engagement, redevelopment inside the URDL can deliver more housing, more affordability, and stronger communities—without sacrificing the county’s long-term vision.

Makeda Scott, District 3

To address the housing shortage, we must prioritize redevelopment within the URDL by focusing on underutilized and vacant properties, such as empty shopping centers, aging commercial corridors, and vacant buildings, and converting them into quality, affordable housing. This approach reduces pressure on rural land while revitalizing existing communities. I would support policies and incentives that encourage mixed-use development, adaptive reuse, and the inclusion of affordable housing units. Just as importantly, redevelopment must be guided by community input and aligned with infrastructure capacity, so growth is both equitable and sustainable. My perspective on this work is grounded in experience. During my time at the Enterprise Foundation, I learned the principles of smart development rooted in the Jim Rouse philosophy, building strong, sustainable communities block by block, with intention and long-term vision. That approach continues to shape how I think about redevelopment in Baltimore County today.

Nino Mangione, District 5

I believe we must allow for reasonable development from within the URDL. I will have an open mind to review projects in conjunction with close communication and input with/from our community associations.

Shawn McIntosh, District 5

I believe we can help address the housing shortage by focusing on thoughtful redevelopment within the URDL, where infrastructure, transportation, and services already exist, rather than pushing sprawl into rural communities. That starts with encouraging the revitalization of underused commercial properties, aging shopping centers, vacant office space, and surface parking lots into mixed-use communities that include housing, retail, green space, and community amenities. We should prioritize redevelopment in areas that already have access to transit, jobs, schools, and utilities, while ensuring that infrastructure keeps pace with growth. I also believe we need a wider range of housing options so people can remain in Baltimore County at different stages of life. That includes workforce housing, smaller starter homes, townhomes, senior housing, and appropriately scaled multi-family development. Too many young families, working professionals, and older adults are being priced out or unable to find housing that meets their needs. At the same time, redevelopment must be done responsibly and transparently. Communities

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deserve to be engaged early in the planning process, not after decisions are already largely made. We need development standards that protect neighborhood character, preserve green space where possible, improve walkability, and avoid overwhelming schools, roads, and public services. Redevelopment within the URDL is not about unchecked density. It's about smart planning, creating more housing opportunities in appropriate locations, reducing pressure on rural land, and building communities that are sustainable, connected, and livable for the long term.

David Marks, District 7

I support thoughtful land use policies that redevelop older communities without sacrificing other important public policies. As an example, Baltimore County's parking regulations should be modified to reduce unnecessary impervious surface and stimulate development, a concept supported by many environmentalists and developers. We should support strategies in the Master Plan and community plans that allow for clustering development where it makes sense, and we should expand transportation access so housing is linked to jobs. For more than a decade, I championed the idea of a circulator in Towson, a concept that can be replicated elsewhere. I have opposed weakening the Adequate Public Facilities Ordinance to allow development in overcrowded school districts.

Cari Santiago, District 7

We must follow the Master Plan 2030 guidelines for smart development and focus on redevelopment and revitalization where the infrastructure supports it. When we hamstring ourselves with unnecessary red tape or single use legislation, we limit our tax base. A broader base of property owners helps lower the individual tax burden and generates the revenue necessary to help fund land preservation initiatives.

Crystal Cody, District 8

By focusing redevelopment on aging commercial corridors and underused properties, we can transform vacant retail centers, aging strip malls, and underutilized parcels into vibrant, mixed-income, walkable communities. By allowing modest "missing-middle" housing (like duplexes, townhomes, accessory dwelling units, tiny starter homes, and senior condos) near major transit corridors, we can increase housing supply, support local businesses, and match the character of existing neighborhoods.

Josh Sines, District 8

We need to make it easier to redevelop underutilized properties and aging commercial sites. That means streamlining the permitting process, reducing unnecessary delays, and encouraging smart redevelopment in appropriate areas. At the same time, redevelopment must be paired with infrastructure improvements. Roads, schools, and public safety services need to be in place first.

Tim Fazenbaker, District 9

Redevelopment inside the URDL is often the smarter path—it leverages existing roads, sewers, and services. I would push for streamlined permitting, reduced red tape, and incentives for mixed-use or attainable housing projects that actually get built, rather than endless studies. At the same time, protect established neighborhoods from over-density that harms property values or character. Focus on practical solutions: attract private investment, cut bureaucratic delays, and ensure new development pays its fair share without burdening current taxpayers.

How would you promote redevelopment within the URDL to help ease the housing shortage?

Russ Mirabile, District 9

I would NOT vote for development. Citizens live in Baltimore County because we do have green space and not brick and mortar or crammed areas. Baltimore County cannot take the free space away just for developers. Maryland is a huge state, thus Baltimore County should be taken off for any further development. Other counties should take up expansion.

Land Preservation

Voluntary, perpetual conservation easements protect the county's natural resources, such as agricultural land, wildlife habitats, scenic views, historic structures, and access to outdoor recreation and education. Currently, over 72,000 acres are protected in Baltimore County. Stream buffers and erosion control measures implemented by conservation easements offer cost-effective solutions to keeping the water that feeds our reservoirs clean and safe to drink. This is important because the Gunpowder River is a drinking water source for 1.8 million Marylanders.

4. What specific policies or funding commitments would you support to permanently protect remaining undeveloped land in Baltimore County, and which would you prioritize?

Mandy Remmell, District 1

I believe continued investment in Baltimore County's land preservation efforts is critical, and as Councilwoman, I would work with my colleagues to prioritize exploring ways to strengthen and sustain programs that have proven effective in permanently protecting our natural and agricultural resources. That includes support for the Friends of Patapsco, Rural Legacy Program, the Agricultural Preservation Program, the Baltimore County Land Trust Coalition, and NeighborSpace of Baltimore County and others, as well as continued attention to stream buffer protections and watershed conservation easements. I also support the expansion of voluntary, perpetual conservation easements, which remain one of the most cost-effective tools we have for protecting farmland, wildlife habitat, scenic landscapes, and critical drinking water sources particularly in sensitive areas like the Gunpowder watershed, which serves 1.8 million Marylanders. Going forward, I would also explore opportunities to strengthen local matching funds to better leverage state and federal resources, ensuring Baltimore County remains competitive in preserving high-value agricultural and ecological land.

N. Westcott V, District 1

Working farms are small businesses. Therefore, they fall within my platform point of "Incentivize Small Business"—too often the focus has been on corporate enterprise when small businesses are at the heart of our communities contributing to our quality of life and social cohesion. Low interest loans for stabilization or expansion, requirement to procure from small businesses when practical to do so, and improve infrastructure (public rights of way/drainage) around small businesses.

Lawrence Williams, District 2

I support continued funding for farmland preservation and agricultural easement programs that protect environmentally sensitive areas and preserve open space. At the same time, I support investing in redevelopment,

What specific policies or funding commitments would you support to permanently protect remaining undeveloped land in Baltimore County, and which would you prioritize?

infrastructure modernization, and revitalization inside the URDL so communities can attract business necessities and amenities for residents. We must balance preservation with thoughtful growth and long-term economic development.

Regg Hatcher Jr., District 3

To protect our remaining natural land, I would prioritize policies that treat our environment like the essential system it is. Just as a clean engine keeps a car running, our farms and forests keep our water clean and our county healthy. My top priority would be to increase funding for conservation easements, which are legal agreements that pay landowners to keep their land as a farm or forest forever. Since 72,000 acres are already protected, we need to finish the job with a permanent solution that ensures this land can never be turned into a shopping mall or a subdivision. Additionally, I would support strict rules for "stream buffers," which are strips of trees and plants along the edges of our waterways. These act as natural filters to catch pollution before it reaches the Gunpowder River, which provides drinking water for nearly 2 million people. Protecting these buffers is a low-cost, high-impact way to keep our water safe. I also want to provide incentives for farmers to use erosion control measures. As an engineer, I know that preventing a problem is always cheaper than fixing it; if we help farmers keep their soil on the farm, we don't have to spend millions of taxpayer dollars cleaning it out of our reservoirs later. Finally, I would support strategic land purchases to turn the most important historical or wildlife areas into public parks. By investing in these areas now, we ensure that Baltimore County stays green and our infrastructure stays sustainable for the next generation.

Tyrod Haynes, District 3

To permanently protect remaining undeveloped land, the county has to move beyond general support and make binding, well-funded commitments that remove land from the speculative development cycle altogether. Within the framework of the Urban-Rural Demarcation Line (URDL), that means pairing strong policy with predictable funding. Here's what I would support—and prioritize: 1) Fully fund agricultural and conservation easements (Top Priority). Priority #1 is permanent protection through easements. This is the most effective tool we have because it legally removes development rights from the land. Expand funding for the Maryland Agricultural Land Preservation Foundation (MALPF), increase county matching funds to accelerate easement acquisitions, and target high-value farmland, contiguous parcels, and environmentally sensitive areas. It creates irreversible protection—not temporary policy that can be undone. 2) Establish a dedicated local funding stream ("lockbox" funding). Protection efforts fail when funding is inconsistent. I would create a dedicated preservation fund insulated from annual budget politics, use a mix of real estate transfer taxes, recordation taxes, or a small bond program, and ensure funds are restricted solely for land preservation and park acquisition. This guarantees long-term capacity instead of year-to-year uncertainty. 3) Expand the Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) program. The county should scale up its own PDR program to complement state efforts: prioritize farms under development pressure, focus on building large, contiguous preservation zones rather than fragmented parcels, and offer competitive pricing to landowners so preservation is a viable alternative to selling to developers. 4) Strengthen zoning and downzoning protections. Policy still matters alongside funding: maintain and reinforce low-density rural zoning outside the URDL, close loopholes that allow incremental subdivision or "by-right" overdevelopment, and evaluate strategic downzoning in vulnerable rural areas. Zoning should align with preservation—not undermine it. 5) Invest in land trusts and public-private partnerships. Nonprofits can move faster and more flexibly than government alone: partner with local and regional land trusts for acquisitions and stewardship, provide matching grants to leverage private and philanthropic dollars, and support long-term management of preserved lands. 6) Expand parkland acquisition—strategically. Preservation isn't only rural—it also supports livability: acquire land for regional parks, greenways, and watershed protection, prioritize areas that connect to existing parks or protect critical environmental assets, and balance recreational access with conservation goals. 7) Tie preservation to environmental resilience. Land protection is also climate policy: preserve

What specific policies or funding commitments would you support to permanently protect remaining undeveloped land in Baltimore County, and which would you prioritize?

forests that act as carbon sinks, protect waterways that reduce flooding and improve water quality, and integrate preservation into the county's stormwater and climate strategies. What I would prioritize, in order: 1) Easements (MALPF + PDR expansion)—permanent, legally binding protection. 2) Dedicated funding stream ("lockbox")—ensures consistency and scale. 3) Zoning enforcement and strategic downzoning—prevent backdoor erosion. 4) Partnerships with land trusts—accelerates impact. 5) Targeted parkland acquisition—complements preservation with access. Bottom line: If we're serious about protecting Baltimore County's remaining undeveloped land, we have to pay for permanence and legislate discipline. The combination of easements, locked-in funding, and aligned zoning is how you turn preservation from a goal into a guarantee.

Makeda Scott, District 3

I would prioritize strengthening and fully funding land preservation programs such as agricultural and conservation easements to permanently protect undeveloped land. That includes expanding support for programs that allow farmers and landowners to voluntarily preserve their land while maintaining its productive use. I would also support dedicated, consistent funding streams rather than one-time allocations for land preservation, including leveraging state and federal partnerships. In addition, I would prioritize policies that reinforce the integrity of the URDL, limit encroachment into rural areas, and direct growth toward redevelopment within existing communities. Preservation is not just about protecting land; it's about protecting our environment, food systems, and long-term fiscal health by avoiding the high cost of extending infrastructure into rural areas.

Nino Mangione, District 5

I believe ongoing support for Program Open Space is very important and I think we should continue this program. I like the general notion of conservation easements as another method, and I like the state programs such as the Rural Legacy Program which provides monies for easement purchases. Additionally, I am opposed and will continue to oppose any effort to move the URDL.

Shawn McIntosh, District 5

I support a multi-layered approach to permanently protecting Baltimore County's remaining undeveloped land, particularly agricultural land, forests, stream buffers, and environmentally sensitive areas that play a critical role in protecting our drinking water, reducing flooding, preserving wildlife habitat, and maintaining the character of our communities. One of my top priorities would be strengthening and fully funding agricultural and land preservation programs, including programs that purchase development rights and conservation easements to permanently protect farmland and open space. These programs are among the most effective tools we have to prevent sprawl and ensure that future generations retain access to working farms and natural landscapes. I also support prioritizing capital funding for parkland acquisition, greenway expansion, and watershed protection, especially in areas under increasing development pressure. Protecting land connected to reservoirs, streams, and forests is not only an environmental issue, but also a public health and fiscal responsibility issue. Equally important is maintaining the integrity of the URDL. Preservation efforts lose effectiveness if development pressures continue pushing outward through repeated exceptions, piecemeal changes, or poorly planned growth decisions. We need long-term planning policies that direct redevelopment and housing growth into appropriate areas inside the URDL while preserving rural and environmentally sensitive areas outside it. I would also support policies that encourage smarter redevelopment and infill within already developed areas so we reduce pressure to build on remaining open land. Protecting undeveloped land and addressing housing and economic needs are not mutually exclusive if we plan strategically. If I had to prioritize, I would focus first on protecting environmentally sensitive land tied to drinking water and watershed

What specific policies or funding commitments would you support to permanently protect remaining undeveloped land in Baltimore County, and which would you prioritize?

health, preserving agricultural land at risk of development pressure, and ensuring that preservation funding remains stable and reliable even during difficult budget years.

David Marks, District 7

Since my election to the Baltimore County Council in 2010, we have protected more than 14,000 acres of additional open space, according to Baltimore County Agricultural Land Preservation Advisory Board 2025 Annual Report. I will continue to support conservation easements and the purchase of land to meet Baltimore County's goal of 80,000 acres of protected property. In 2012, I sponsored the legislation that created Neighborhood Commons zoning, which allows for certain property—such as government-owned land—to be designated as open space. The Neighborhood Commons overlay means that if Baltimore County wants to sell publicly owned property, the zoning can only be removed following a year-long process that allows for community input. Thousands of acres of land have been preserved through the Neighborhood Commons zoning. In my district, we have applied the Neighborhood Commons zoning to many parks and publicly owned properties, including one parcel in Middle River eyed for development. We should also continue to support creative strategies with developers and other stakeholders that set aside green space. As an example, when negotiating for the purchase of the Gerst Road Park in Perry Hall, I successfully persuaded the White Marsh Recreation Council to help make up the difference between the appraised value of the land and what the property owners wanted to receive from Baltimore County.

Cari Santiago, District 7

My priority is permanent protection through environmental easements and watershed preservation. We must protect individual property rights by bolstering programs like the Rural Legacy and MALPF (Maryland Agricultural Land Preservation Foundation). This should be a robust partnership between the government and residents, focusing on keeping rural spaces rural while actively improving the long-term health of our forests and waterways.

Crystal Cody, District 8

To permanently protect District 8's remaining undeveloped land, we must secure dedicated funding within the county's Capital Improvement Program specifically locking in Program Open Space allocations and agricultural transfer taxes to leverage the state-designated Coastal Rural Legacy Area. Targeted funding must focus on our vulnerable shorelines and sensitive watersheds. By ensuring stable, multi-year matching funds, we empower trusted partners to acquire conservation easements shielding critical wetlands from development pressure.

Josh Sines, District 8

I support expanding funding for agricultural preservation programs and conservation easements to permanently protect farmland and environmentally sensitive areas. This is something I believe in personally as well. I own a small farm that is under a conservation easement with Gunpowder Valley Conservancy, which reflects my commitment to long-term land preservation. I would prioritize protecting land that directly impacts our waterways, including areas feeding into the Chesapeake Bay, as well as preserving prime agricultural soils and contiguous open space.

Tim Fazenbaker, District 9

I support voluntary conservation tools like easements when they make sense for prime agricultural soils, wildlife habitats, or scenic/water resources—especially those protecting the Gunpowder River watershed. Prioritize cost-effective, targeted efforts over blanket “permanent” protections that lock up land indefinitely and limit future options for the county. Funding should come with strict accountability: measurable outcomes, no waste, and consideration for

What specific policies or funding commitments would you support to permanently protect remaining undeveloped land in Baltimore County, and which would you prioritize?

how it affects local farming viability or economic opportunity. Avoid policies that favor elite preservation interests over the needs of families and businesses trying to afford living and working here.

Russ Mirabile, District 9

Stay the course and seek the guidance of URDL. I would vote to either increase or maintain funding.

5. How would you balance development pressure with watershed protection?

Mandy Rimmell, District 1

Watershed protection must be a non-negotiable baseline in land-use decisions. When development is proposed near sensitive watersheds, it must meet the highest environmental standards, with mitigation requirements that are fully enforced, not optional. I also recognize that many responsible developers already approach projects with these protections and long-term land preservation considerations in mind from the outset. As Councilwoman, I will continue to maintain open and ongoing dialogue with both community members and investors to ensure that future growth is thoughtful, context-sensitive, and aligned with the character and needs of our neighborhoods. Every proposal should be evaluated through a strong environmental lens, ensuring that we are making decisions that protect our natural resources while supporting appropriate, well-planned development in the right places.

N. Westcott V, District 1

Let's closely examine density models that limit stress on the natural environment. If there are opportunities to rezone areas for greater population density while maintaining watershed integrity, those opportunities should be considered.

Lawrence Williams, District 2

Protecting our watershed is important to public health, environmental sustainability, and the overall quality of life in Baltimore County. Balancing development pressure with watershed protection is a complex issue that requires thoughtful planning and responsible growth. I believe we can support redevelopment and economic investment while still preserving green space, reducing environmental impacts, and protecting the natural resources our communities rely on. I am committed to listening to experts, residents, and community stakeholders to support practical solutions that balance growth with environmental responsibility. I strongly believe in being good stewards of the earth and preserving our environment for future generations.

Regg Hatcher Jr., District 3

To balance development pressure with watershed protection, I would treat the county's land like a high-performance filter. When we build new houses or offices, we replace grass and trees with "hard" surfaces like roofs and asphalt. Since rainwater can't soak into the ground in those spots, it rushes off, picking up oil and trash before dumping it into our streams and the Gunpowder River. As an engineer with 20 years of experience, I know that we have to manage this flow with technical precision to keep our drinking water safe. My approach is to prioritize "Green Infrastructure" within our development projects. This means instead of just building big concrete pipes to carry water away, we require developers to build rain gardens, use permeable pavement that lets water soak through, and plant more trees. These methods act as natural sponges that slow down and clean the water right where it falls. By making these green solutions a requirement for new construction inside the URDL, we can allow the county to grow without overwhelming our natural water systems. Finally, I would strictly enforce "Stream Buffers," which are the protected

How would you balance development pressure with watershed protection?

strips of land along the edges of our waterways. Think of these buffers as the last line of defense for our environment. By keeping development a safe distance away from the water's edge, we allow nature to do its job of filtering out pollution. This strategy allows us to meet the demand for new housing while ensuring that the water coming out of our taps remains clean and affordable for everyone in Baltimore County.

Tyrod Haynes, District 3

Balancing development pressure with watershed protection requires treating watersheds as hard infrastructure constraints, not after-the-fact mitigation. If we get that hierarchy right—water first, growth second—we can accommodate development inside the Urban-Rural Demarcation Line (URDL) without degrading the systems that sustain it. Here's how I would operationalize that balance: 1) Set enforceable watershed limits ("carrying capacity"). Every watershed should have clear, science-based thresholds for impervious surface coverage, nutrient and sediment loading, and stream health indicators (biological scores, temperature, flow). Once a subwatershed approaches its limit, approvals should tighten or pause until offsets or restoration bring it back into compliance. 2) Require "no net degradation" (and move toward net improvement). Make approvals contingent on outcomes, not promises: new projects must achieve no net increase in runoff or pollution, prioritize on-site mitigation first, with off-site only as a secondary option, and for sensitive areas, require net environmental gain (you leave the watershed better than you found it). 3) Modernize stormwater standards—beyond minimum compliance. The baseline should be high-performance, green infrastructure: permeable pavement, bioswales, rain gardens, green roofs as standard, not optional, incentivize low-impact development (LID) site design to reduce runoff at the source, and retrofit older developments that predate modern standards. This reduces long-term costs compared to retroactive fixes. 4) Protect and expand natural buffers. Enforce and widen stream buffers and forest conservation areas, prioritize reforestation along waterways and in headwater regions, and permanently protect high-value ecological corridors through easements. Buffers are the most cost-effective filtration system we have. 5) Direct growth to the least sensitive areas. Not all land inside the URDL is equal: steer density toward areas with existing infrastructure and lower ecological sensitivity, restrict or heavily condition development in critical recharge zones and flood-prone areas, and use data-driven mapping to guide approvals—not case-by-case negotiation. 6) Align infrastructure investment with watershed goals. Upgrade aging stormwater, sewer, and drainage systems in priority basins, integrate watershed goals into capital budgeting—not treat them as separate silos, and use development impact fees to fund watershed restoration where growth occurs. 7) Strengthen enforcement and accountability. Policy without enforcement is symbolic: increase inspection and compliance capacity, impose meaningful penalties for violations, and require long-term maintenance guarantees for stormwater systems. Bottom line: You don't "balance" development and watershed protection by splitting the difference—you do it by setting non-negotiable environmental limits and designing growth within them. If we respect watershed capacity, invest in modern infrastructure, and enforce the rules consistently, we can grow inside the URDL without compromising water quality, public health, or long-term sustainability.

Makeda Scott, District 3

Balancing development with watershed protection requires planning and firm standards. First, we must direct growth to areas where infrastructure already exists and can support it, primarily within the URDL, while avoiding environmentally sensitive areas. Second, I would support strong stormwater management requirements, green infrastructure, and enforcement of environmental regulations to protect our waterways from runoff and pollution. Finally, watershed protection must be part of every land use decision, not an afterthought. That means evaluating cumulative environmental impacts, preserving natural buffers, and ensuring that development today does not create long-term environmental and financial costs for residents.

How would you balance development pressure with watershed protection?

Nino Mangione, District 5

I think we are going to need to focus on restoration and protection strategies which will help us create reasonable pollution reduction goals. We are also going to have to further explore productive common-sense options to protect our drinking water reservoirs as well. I believe it is possible to foster collaboration between developers, community members and county government to protect our water quality. I am learning about these issues, and it appears to me that there are productive strategies that focus on land disturbance, utilizing zoning to protect watershed areas and buffer zones.

Shawn McIntosh, District 5

Balancing development pressure with watershed protection starts with recognizing that protecting our waterways and drinking water sources is not optional. It is a core responsibility of local government and essential to public health, environmental sustainability, and long-term fiscal stability. I believe the best way to achieve that balance is by directing the majority of growth and redevelopment into appropriate areas inside the URDL where infrastructure already exists, while maintaining strong protections for environmentally sensitive land, forests, stream buffers, wetlands, and reservoir watersheds outside the URDL. We also need to strengthen how we evaluate development impacts. Too often, projects are reviewed individually without fully considering cumulative impacts on stormwater runoff, flooding, traffic, aging infrastructure, and water quality. I support science-based planning, stronger environmental review processes, and investments in modern stormwater management and green infrastructure to reduce runoff and protect waterways. At the same time, redevelopment inside the URDL should prioritize sustainability. That includes preserving green space where possible, encouraging tree canopy protection and restoration, improving walkability and transit access, and incorporating resilient infrastructure that can better handle increased rainfall and climate-related challenges. Community engagement is also critical. Residents deserve transparency and meaningful input early in the planning process, especially when projects could affect local waterways, flooding patterns, or environmental quality. Ultimately, I do not believe we have to choose between economic growth and watershed protection. But growth must be planned responsibly, with clear environmental guardrails and a recognition that once critical natural areas and water resources are damaged, it is often extraordinarily difficult and expensive to restore them.

David Marks, District 7

I will continue to oppose development near our reservoirs and along waterways. Zoning is an important tool that can be used to steer development toward sites that are less environmentally sensitive. From 2015 to 2022, I served as Baltimore County's representative to the Critical Areas Commission, which regulates development along tributaries and coastal watersheds, where I learned to value the recommendations of professional staff members trained in environmental management.

Cari Santiago, District 7

We must treat the Master Plan 2030 as a mandate, not a suggestion. Many of our Tier II watersheds have reached assimilative capacity (meaning they cannot absorb more runoff without permanent damage). To balance development and protection we need a shift in our mindset: watershed protection is not an obstacle to progress; it should be the framework for it. By integrating watershed protection into every land-use decision, we ensure forward progress doesn't come at the cost of our natural resources.

How would you balance development pressure with watershed protection?

Crystal Cody, District 8

Gunpowder River, Bird River, Middle River, and Back River bear the brunt of upstream runoff. To balance growth, we must enforce strict Chesapeake Bay Critical Area regulations and mandate aggressive green infrastructure. Every new redevelopment project on Eastern Boulevard or Route 40 must be viewed as an opportunity to fix legacy stormwater issues. We must mandate bioretention, increase the urban tree canopy, and use permeable surfaces to stop polluted runoff from hitting our rivers, protecting both our environment and our waterfront homeowners from chronic flooding.

Josh Sines, District 8

Protecting our waterways must be a priority. Development should meet strong environmental standards and should not move forward if it threatens water quality or overwhelms existing infrastructure. We have seen the consequences of getting that balance wrong, and we need to do better moving forward.

Tim Fazenbaker, District 9

Watershed protection is non-negotiable—clean water is essential for public health and our reservoirs. I would enforce strong stream buffers, erosion controls, and environmental standards on any development. Balance comes from smart, site-specific decisions: encourage redevelopment on already disturbed sites first, require developers to mitigate impacts fully, and reject projects that pose real risks. Local control and transparency in the process are key so that decisions reflect community input, not just advocacy from one side.

Russ Mirabile, District 9

If we don't have a protected watershed, we have no fresh water, thus "we all die." No development near any watershed.

Baltimore County Agriculture

As of 2022, Baltimore County is home to 783 farms on 70,217 acres of land, accounting for \$92,699,000 in market value of products sold. 67% of these farms are under 50 acres in size, and 92% are family farms¹. Financial and development pressure pose a constant threat to both generational farming and the protection of land with prime agricultural soils.

6. How would you take agriculture into consideration when making zoning or land use decisions?

Mandy Rimmell, District 1

Agriculture must be treated as a core part of Baltimore County's identity, economy, and future, not as land waiting to be converted. Protecting agriculture is not just an environmental issue, but an economic and generational one. Having the experience working in Baltimore County Government on zoning matters and as a future member of the County Council, I recognize that zoning decisions carry long-term consequences, and they must be approached thoughtfully and collaboratively. We have a shared responsibility on the Council to look at each proposal not just in

¹ "Baltimore County Maryland," Census of Agriculture, 2022, https://www.nass.usda.gov/Publications/AgCensus/2022/Online_Resources/County_Profiles/Maryland/cp24005.pdf.

How would you take agriculture into consideration when making zoning or land use decisions?

isolation, but in the broader context of how it impacts farmland, water quality, surrounding communities, and the long-term sustainability of our agricultural economy. That means working closely with my future colleagues to ensure we are fully evaluating the cumulative impacts of zoning and land use changes, and that agriculture is consistently considered as a long-term land use. I also believe strongly that “councilmanic courtesy” should not be used as a barrier to meaningful discussion on zoning matters. We owe it to our residents, our farmers, and our environment to have open, transparent, and honest conversations about land use decisions, even when they are complex or difficult. Those decisions should be guided by data, community input, and a shared commitment to preserving what makes Baltimore County’s agricultural heritage so valuable.

N. Westcott V, District 1

We need farms! We need to set the “Community Benefit” bar extremely high when we are discussing non-agricultural development of working farms or working farm adjacent projects.

Lawrence Williams, District 2

My approach would be to lean on input from farmers, residents, environmental experts, and community stakeholders to ensure development is responsible, sustainable, and benefits the community as a whole. Smart growth requires collaboration, thoughtful planning, and a balanced approach that considers agriculture, environmental protection, infrastructure, housing, and quality of life together. Agriculture is an important part of Baltimore County’s economy, environment, and community character. Baltimore County is home to hundreds of farms and agricultural businesses, many of them family-owned operations facing increasing financial and development pressures. While I am not a farmer or agricultural expert, I understand the importance of balancing responsible growth with protecting farmland and agricultural resources for future generations. I also recognize Baltimore County has agricultural advisory and preservation boards that provide expertise on these issues, and I believe elected officials should listen to those experts, along with residents and farmers, when making zoning and land use decisions. My approach is simple: listen first, review the facts, and support thoughtful planning that promotes smart and sustainable growth for Baltimore County.

Regg Hatcher Jr., District 3

I will approach land use and zoning as a complex system where every piece must work together to be successful. Agriculture isn't just "empty land"; it is a vital industry and a primary piece of our county’s infrastructure. When making zoning decisions, I would focus on three key areas: 1) Protecting Prime Soil and Family Farms. Since 92% of our farms are family owned, zoning must protect them from being crowded out by large-scale developments. As an engineer, I know that "prime agricultural soil" is a nonrenewable resource—once you build a parking lot over it, that high-quality dirt is gone forever. I would prioritize keeping these lands zoned specifically for farming so that generational families aren't pressured to sell because of rising costs or nearby construction. 2) Modernizing "Agri-Business" Rules. Farming has changed, and our zoning laws need to keep up. I would support "flexible zoning" that allows smaller farms (under 50 acres) to stay profitable. This means making it easier for farmers to host farm stands, agritourism, or small processing facilities on their own property. By allowing farmers to innovate, we make the business of farming more stable, which reduces the pressure to sell the land for housing. 3) Infrastructure and Buffer Zones. My professional background teaches me that different systems need "buffers" to avoid interference. I would support zoning policies that create clear transitions between residential areas and working farms. This prevents the "conflict" that happens when new housing is built too close to active farm operations. By keeping our development focused inside the URDL, we ensure that our agricultural infrastructure has the space and the "right-to-farm" protections it needs to thrive for another 20 years and beyond.

How would you take agriculture into consideration when making zoning or land use decisions?

Tyrod Haynes, District 3

Agriculture shouldn't be treated as "undeveloped land waiting for something else." It's a productive economic sector, a land-use stabilizer, and an environmental asset—and zoning should reflect that reality. Within the framework of the Urban-Rural Demarcation Line (URDL), my approach is to protect, prioritize, and make farming viable long-term. 1) Treat agriculture as a priority land use—not a placeholder. Zoning decisions should start with a clear premise: farmland has intrinsic value. Designate and maintain Agricultural Priority Areas, align zoning with long-term agricultural use, not speculative development pressure, and avoid incremental erosion through piecemeal rezoning. 2) Limit fragmentation and incompatible uses. One of the biggest threats to agriculture isn't just development—it's fragmentation. Maintain large minimum lot sizes in rural zones, restrict subdivisions that break up viable farms, and prevent incompatible uses that create conflicts (traffic, noise complaints, encroachment). Once farms are fragmented, they rarely return to productivity. 3) Use easements and zoning together. Zoning alone can be changed; permanent protection requires both tools working together. Prioritize land for preservation through programs like the Maryland Agricultural Land Preservation Foundation, target contiguous farmland blocks to preserve entire agricultural regions, and align zoning designations with easement priorities so policy and investment reinforce each other. 4) Support farm viability through flexible, modern zoning. Protection without viability doesn't work. Farmers need to be able to operate competitively. Allow value-added uses (farm stands, agritourism, onsite processing), update zoning to support modern agricultural practices, and reduce unnecessary permitting barriers for farm related structures and activities. This keeps land in active production instead of being sold off. 5) Create buffers between development and agriculture. Where development meets farmland, conflict is predictable unless planned for: require buffer zones and setbacks between new housing and farms, use clustering techniques to keep development away from active farmland, and educate new residents about living near agricultural operations. 6) Incorporate agriculture into broader planning decisions. Agriculture should be integrated—not siloed: factor farmland preservation into transportation, water, and economic planning, support local food systems and markets to strengthen the agricultural economy, and coordinate with environmental goals like watershed protection and open space conservation. 7) Apply a "no net loss of farmland" mindset. Track and publicly report farmland conversion annually, require mitigation when agricultural land is lost (e.g., preservation elsewhere), and set measurable preservation targets and hold the county accountable. Bottom line: Agriculture has to be protected on paper, preserved in practice, and supported economically. If zoning limits fragmentation, easements provide permanence, and policies support farm viability, we can ensure agriculture remains a defining and sustainable part of Baltimore County—not a disappearing one.

Makeda Scott, District 3

Agriculture is a vital part of Baltimore County's economy, heritage, and sustainability, and it must be treated as such in zoning and land use decisions. I would prioritize protecting agricultural land through zoning that limits incompatible development and supports long-term farming viability. That includes supporting agricultural preservation programs while ensuring that policies reflect the needs of farmers, not just developers. I would also consider how land use decisions impact local food systems, environmental sustainability, and rural communities.

Nino Mangione, District 5

The 5th District has some of the most useful, productive farmland in Maryland. I think the various considerations of farmland must be a part of any decision on zoning matters.

Shawn McIntosh, District 5

Agriculture should be treated as a long-term economic, environmental, and community asset when making zoning and land use decisions, not simply as undeveloped land waiting for future development. Farming remains an

How would you take agriculture into consideration when making zoning or land use decisions?

important part of Baltimore County's economy, heritage, food system, and environmental health. When evaluating zoning or land use changes, I would prioritize protecting productive farmland from fragmentation and incompatible development patterns that make farming more difficult or less viable over time. Once farmland is lost to sprawl and development, it's gone. We don't get that land back. I support maintaining the integrity of the URDL, strengthening agricultural preservation programs, and encouraging redevelopment and smart growth inside the URDL so that development pressure is not constantly pushing outward into rural communities. At the same time, we should support the long-term viability of farming by encouraging agricultural innovation, agritourism, local food systems, and policies that help farmers remain economically sustainable. Land preservation alone is not enough if farming itself becomes financially impossible. Most importantly, land use decisions should involve meaningful engagement with the agricultural community and residents who are directly impacted. Farmers deserve a seat at the table when decisions are being made that could affect their livelihoods, infrastructure needs, or the future of rural communities.

David Marks, District 7

I cosponsored the legislation that allows voters to amend the Baltimore County charter to create a permanent Department of Agriculture. This charter change will consolidate agriculture-related functions and strengthen the position of farmers when all decisions are made, including on land use decisions. As a Councilmember, I have considered the viewpoints of all stakeholders when passing legislation or making zoning decisions. I have good relations with many farmers in eastern and northern Baltimore County. Their input is important because development can squeeze agricultural operations and jeopardize the long-term viability of family farms. As an example, I recommended downzoning the Chapel Road corridor in Perry Hall to help preserve one of that community's last nurseries. Before introducing the legislation that led to Question A, I actively consulted with many farmers throughout Baltimore County. Several farmers testified in support of our legislation.

Cari Santiago, District 7

Maryland is an agricultural state, and our zoning must reflect that reality. My focus is not on "defending" the rural North, but rather on supporting its multigenerational residents in the greater framework of our County. When it comes to land use, there is a balance between conservation and property rights, and it starts with consistency. I support initiatives that prohibit overdevelopment and protect prime soils, provided they are applied uniformly. Our zoning and land use legislation should not be left to the whim of a District's representative; our residents deserve the stability of predictable land-use rules.

Crystal Cody, District 8

While District 8 is largely suburban and marine-industrial, agriculture remains vital to our local economy through agritourism, local nurseries, and our proximity to the county's agricultural core. Zoning decisions must prevent the fragmentation of remaining intact soils and support regional hubs like the Center for Maryland Agriculture. Furthermore, in District 8, we must broaden our view of agriculture to protect our maritime and seafood industries, ensuring that land-use decisions do not negatively impact the water quality crucial to local fisheries and crabbing.

Josh Sines, District 8

Agriculture is an important part of Baltimore County's identity and economy. I would prioritize protecting farmland from unnecessary development, support zoning that keeps agricultural land viable, and ensure decisions do not gradually erode working farms. Once farmland is lost, it is gone permanently.

How would you take agriculture into consideration when making zoning or land use decisions?

Tim Fazenbaker, District 9

Agriculture remains important to Baltimore County's heritage and economy, with hundreds of farms (many small/family operations). When zoning or land use decisions arise, I will weigh impacts on viable farming—protecting prime soils where practical, supporting agritourism or value-added opportunities, and avoiding rules that make it impossible for farmers to operate or pass land to the next generation. Decisions must also consider broader county needs: jobs, housing, and growth. No one-size-fits-all approach; case-by-case with input from actual farmers, not just planners or preservation groups.

Russ Mirabile, District 9

Agriculture is a food product that we all need. No food: No people. Food and water are both necessary or there is no life.

7. What is your view on the current state legislation allowing solar electrical arrays to be constructed on agricultural land and open space?

Mandy Rimmell, District 1

Renewable energy is important for our future. It helps us reduce pollution, fight climate change, and build a more sustainable county. But just as with housing and other development, where we place these projects really matters. As we move forward with solar and other renewable energy projects, we have to make sure that environmental protections and public health stay the top priority for our residents. Clean energy and strong land protection should go hand in hand and not compete with each other. That's why I support focusing solar development in the right places, like brownfields, rooftops, parking lots and canopies, and other already developed or disturbed land. These are smart locations where we can generate clean energy without impacting farmland or natural spaces. At the same time, I am cautious about large-scale solar projects on prime agricultural land or preserved open space. Once we lose farmland or natural land, it is very difficult if not impossible to get it back. We can and should support clean energy goals while also protecting food security, rural heritage, and the natural environment that makes Baltimore County special. Smart siting allows us to do both in a responsible and balanced way.

N. Westcott V, District 1

Once you construct anything on it, is it still open space? I'd have to have to get a better understanding of what that solar electrical array construction looks like. But right now, as I write this response, I don't support it.

Lawrence Williams, District 2

I support renewable energy and understand the importance of expanding clean energy generation, but I also believe we must be thoughtful about where large solar projects are located. Baltimore County's farmland and open space are valuable resources, and many family farms are already facing financial and development pressures. My concern with the current state legislation is making sure we maintain a balanced approach that protects productive agricultural land while still advancing our clean energy goals. I believe we should continue exploring innovative siting options such as rooftops, parking canopies, brownfields, commercial and industrial properties, sound barriers, and even existing fueling stations that may transition into EV charging hubs before placing unnecessary pressure on farmland and open space. I also believe local communities, farmers, and agricultural advisory boards should continue to have

What is your view on the current state legislation allowing solar electrical arrays to be constructed on agricultural land and open space?

a meaningful voice in the process. My approach is very simple: support smart, sustainable growth, protect valuable agricultural resources, and pursue renewables.

Regg Hatcher Jr., District 3

I see the push for solar energy as a technical challenge that requires a balanced design. While renewable energy is a critical "system" for our future, we have to be careful about where we "install" it so we don't break other important systems, like our food supply and environmental protections. I believe we should be very cautious about placing large solar arrays on prime agricultural land or protected open spaces. As an engineer, I look for the most efficient solution: we should first place solar panels on "disturbed" lands—like old landfills, large parking lots, and the roofs of big warehouses or shopping centers inside the URDL. This allows us to generate clean power close to where people actually use it without destroying high-quality soil that we need for farming. If we do allow solar on agricultural land, it should only be under very strict conditions. I support "dual-use" or "agri-voltaics," where solar panels are built high enough off the ground that farmers can still graze animals or grow certain crops underneath them. This way, the land is doing two jobs at once. My priority is ensuring that state legislation doesn't give developers a "blank check" to pave over our best farms. We need professional oversight to make sure we are building a green energy future that doesn't come at the expense of our local food security.

Tyrod Haynes, District 3

My view is straightforward: Maryland's current solar legislation is directionally right on clean energy—but structurally flawed when it comes to protecting agricultural land and local planning authority. The balance is off, and counties like Baltimore need to recalibrate it. There is a legitimate state interest driving this policy. Maryland is aggressively expanding solar to meet climate and energy goals, with solar already supplying ~7% of the state's electricity and powering hundreds of thousands of homes, and laws like the Renewable Energy Certainty Act streamline approvals and standardize permitting to accelerate renewable deployment. That matters. We cannot meet emissions targets or reduce energy costs without scaling renewable energy—including utility-scale solar. Where the concern is real—and justified—the problem is how and where that expansion is happening. 1) Erosion of local control. The law limits counties' ability to block or shape solar projects, even through zoning, and decision-making shifts toward the state level (Public Service Commission), reducing local input. That undermines the ability of Baltimore County to align land use with its own planning priorities, including the URDL. 2) Pressure on agricultural land. Farmers are already reporting increased solicitation and pressure to convert farmland to solar use, and there is legitimate concern that thousands of acres could shift out of food production. Even with guardrails like a 5% cap on solar in Priority Preservation Areas, many in agriculture argue that threshold is too high and could still erode the farm base. 3) Misalignment with smart growth principles. Solar is being sited, in some cases, on productive farmland, open space that should be preserved, and areas that conflict with long-term land-use plans. That contradicts the core idea behind the Urban-Rural Demarcation Line (URDL): direct growth and infrastructure to appropriate areas, not into protected landscapes. My position: "Right goal, wrong siting strategy." I support solar expansion—but not at the expense of agriculture or smart land use. We should be clear: You don't solve one long-term crisis (climate) by creating another (loss of farmland and local control). What I would advocate for as a County Council member: 1) "Right place" solar policy. Prioritize solar development on rooftops (commercial, industrial, public buildings), parking lots (solar canopies), brownfields, landfills, and previously disturbed land, and industrial zones inside the URDL. Prime farmland should be the last—not first—option. 2) Strengthen farmland protections at the county level. Even within state constraints, we can tighten local definitions of prime agricultural soils, require enhanced review for solar proposals on preserved or high-value farmland, and pair solar approvals with mandatory agricultural mitigation or preservation elsewhere. 3) Advocate for state-level adjustments. I would push for reforms such as lowering or refining the 5% cap in Priority

What is your view on the current state legislation allowing solar electrical arrays to be constructed on agricultural land and open space?

Preservation Areas, restoring more local zoning authority and input, and requiring stronger site selection hierarchy (disturbed land first). 4) Support dual-use solutions (agrivoltaics). Where solar does intersect with farmland: encourage agrivoltaics (solar + continued agricultural production), and require soil protection, decommissioning plans, and land restoration guarantees. Bottom line: Solar energy is essential—but location matters. We should lead on clean energy without sacrificing farmland, local planning authority, or the long-term integrity of our land-use strategy. The goal isn't to stop solar—it's to put it where it belongs.

Makeda Scott, District 3

I support the expansion of renewable energy, including solar, as part of a broader strategy to address climate change. However, I have concerns about placing large-scale solar arrays on prime agricultural land and open space without careful consideration. We must strike a balance by prioritizing solar development on already developed or underutilized sites such as rooftops, parking lots, brownfields, and industrial areas before using productive farmland. Energy policy should not come at the expense of our agricultural base or open space preservation. I would advocate for policies that encourage smart siting of solar projects, protect high-quality farmland, and ensure that local communities have a voice in these decisions.

Nino Mangione, District 5

I think Gov. Moore and the Democrat supermajority were a bit careless in their approach to this. I am much more focused on solar panels on roof tops, barn tops etc. as a way to expand solar. I think we want to do everything within the bounds of reasonableness to protect farmland.

Shawn McIntosh, District 5

I support Maryland's transition to renewable energy and believe solar must be part of our long-term energy strategy. However, I have serious concerns about current state legislation that weakens local zoning authority and allows large-scale solar arrays to be constructed on agricultural land and open space without sufficient local input. Prime farmland, forests, and environmentally sensitive land are finite resources. Once that land is lost, we do not get it back. These areas are critical not only for agriculture, but also for protecting watersheds, preserving wildlife habitat, supporting local food systems, and safeguarding the source of our drinking water. I believe local governments and communities should retain a strong voice in land use decisions that directly impact their environment, infrastructure, and quality of life. At the same time, I do not believe this has to be framed as a choice between clean energy and land preservation. We should prioritize solar development on rooftops, parking lots, brownfields, landfills, industrial properties, and other previously disturbed sites before converting productive farmland and open space. I also support exploring innovative approaches like agrivoltaics and dual-use solar where appropriate. Ultimately, I support a balanced approach that advances renewable energy while protecting farmland, watersheds, open space, and the integrity of local planning decisions.

David Marks, District 7

I opposed recent actions by the Maryland General Assembly that have reduced local decision-making and will allow for more solar facilities to be built on productive farmland. The General Assembly's actions are shortsighted and counterproductive to Baltimore County's land preservation goals. There must be renewed effort to place solar facilities in brownfields and urbanized areas that already have an impervious surface. I'm also concerned about the clustering of solar facilities in places like Kingsville, which is why I passed legislation establishing a distance requirement for these arrays where there is county regulation.

What is your view on the current state legislation allowing solar electrical arrays to be constructed on agricultural land and open space?

Cari Santiago, District 7

Do I think it's the best place for solar arrays? No. We should prioritize "Solar Canopies" (over parking lots and brownfields) rather than open-field designs on usable agricultural lands or forests, but it's a prioritization, not an absolute. Renewable energies and land preservation share the same end goal: long-term protection of our natural resources.

Crystal Cody, District 8

Renewable energy is essential, but we should not destroy prime farmland or clear-cut contiguous forests to achieve it. In District 8, we have vast industrial rooftops, sprawling warehouse complexes, brownfields, and massive parking lot canopies (such as around the White Marsh Mall area) that are ideal for utility-scale solar arrays. The county should incentivize solar development on these already-disturbed surfaces before allowing the conversion of productive agricultural land or sensitive coastal buffer zones.

Josh Sines, District 8

I support renewable energy, but not at the expense of productive farmland. Large-scale solar projects should be directed to appropriate locations such as rooftops, brownfields, and industrial areas, rather than prime agricultural land. We need a balanced approach that protects both our environment and our food supply.

Tim Fazenbaker, District 9

I am concerned about state overreach that limits local control and pushes largescale solar onto productive farmland or open space. While renewable energy has a role, prime agricultural land should primarily stay in food production, not industrial energy installations that can alter landscapes, affect neighbors, and tie up acreage for decades. I support farmer choice on their own property with proper local oversight, setbacks, and decommissioning requirements—but I oppose mandates or incentives that prioritize solar quotas over preserving working farms. Baltimore County should fight to retain zoning authority and protect our ag base from being converted wholesale.

Russ Mirabile, District 9

Against solar electrical farms to be constructed on agricultural areas or open space, as mentioned above.

Governance

8. How would you ensure that your decisions, particularly with respect to land use, are open and transparent, and have considered all relevant views?

Mandy Rimmell, District 1

As your next Council Representative, I will advocate for a land use process that is open, transparent, and truly inclusive of all voices from the very beginning, not after decisions are already made. As the former Director of the Baltimore County Executive's Office of Community Engagement, I understand how to run an effective engagement process. I know what it takes to ensure proper notice is given, meetings are accessible, and residents, businesses, and community organizations all have a real seat at the table. Good engagement is not just about checking a box, it is about building trust through consistent communication and meaningful listening. I will also stand up for a process where communities are kept informed every step of the way. When plans change, and they often do, it is critical that

How would you ensure that your decisions, particularly with respect to land use, are open and transparent, and have considered all relevant views?

both residents and local businesses are notified clearly and in real time. Keeping people in the loop cannot be an afterthought, it has to be a priority. In particular when it comes to land use decisions, environmental protection, and the preservation of open space, I will make transparency and community involvement a core part of the process. These decisions shape the future of our neighborhoods, our natural resources, and our quality of life, and they must be made with full public awareness and input. In my role, I will work to make sure decisions around land use are not made in isolation. They must reflect input from homeowners, farmers, environmental advocates, business owners, and civic leaders, all considered together in a fair and balanced way. Transparency means more than public meetings, it means accessibility, honesty, and follow through. That is the standard I will bring to the County Council every day.

N. Westcott V, District 1

Let's respect the URDL boundary. Let's do our due diligence on watershed impact, both short and long term. Let's ensure a measure of green/open space on all future developments. Finally, If the Council wants to continue its culture of secrecy and sweetheart developer deals and backroom handshake agreements... "I'm telling!"

Lawrence Williams, District 2

Land use decisions should never happen behind closed doors. I believe in transparency, accountability, and strong public participation to ensure decisions reflect the voices of the community. Residents deserve to be informed early and given meaningful opportunities to participate through public meetings, workshops, community conversations, digital platforms, and public comment periods before decisions are made, not after. The development review process should evaluate multiple options and carefully consider impacts on neighborhoods, schools, traffic, infrastructure, public safety, and overall quality of life. My approach is simple: listen first, review the facts, and make decisions through an open, fair, and respectful process.

Regg Hatcher Jr., District 3

I know that the best decisions are made when the process is transparent and the data is open for everyone to see. In my professional career, I've managed complex projects where clear communication was the only way to succeed, and I will bring that same technical oversight to the County Council. To make sure my land-use decisions are open and fair, I will focus on three specific steps: 1) Open Access to Data: I believe every resident should be able to see exactly what I see. I will advocate for a digital "dashboard" where the community can track zoning requests, development plans, and environmental impact reports in real-time. As an engineer, I want the community to have the same "situational awareness" that I have before a vote is even scheduled. 2) Early and Better Communication: Too often, neighbors only find out about a new building project when the "Construction" sign goes up. I want to change the system so that the county uses modern technology—like text alerts and social media—to notify residents the moment a project is proposed in their area. This gives everyone a chance to share their views while a plan is still in the "draft" phase. 3) Community Impact Meetings: I will host regular "Technical Town Halls" where we don't just talk in circles, but actually look at the blueprints and maps together. My goal is to listen to all sides—including homeowners, environmental advocates, and farmers—to ensure that our growth doesn't break the systems we all rely on. In short, I will treat my role on the Council like a professional contract with the voters. I will keep the "books" open, provide regular progress reports, and make sure that no decision is made behind closed doors. Transparency isn't just a goal; it's a requirement for a modern, well-run government.

How would you ensure that your decisions, particularly with respect to land use, are open and transparent, and have considered all relevant views?

Tyrod Haynes, District 3

Open, transparent land-use decision-making doesn't happen by intent—it requires structure, standards, and enforceable practices. My approach is to make transparency the default and ensure that every major decision shows its work, especially within the framework of the Urban-Rural Demarcation Line (URDL). Here's how I would operationalize that: 1) Publish the full record—early, not late. Residents shouldn't have to chase information. Post all development proposals, site plans, traffic studies, and environmental reviews online in one place, require materials to be available well before hearings, not days prior, and provide plain-language summaries alongside technical documents. Transparency starts with access. 2) Standardize a “decision memo” for every major land-use action. Every vote should be backed by a clear, public rationale: what the proposal is, how it aligns (or conflicts) with zoning, the comprehensive plan, and the URDL, infrastructure and environmental impacts, and community input received—and how it influenced the outcome. This creates a traceable logic chain for every decision. 3) Require early and meaningful community engagement. Too often, the public is brought in after decisions are effectively shaped. Mandate pre-application community meetings for significant developments, hold meetings at accessible times and locations (including virtual options), and ensure outreach goes beyond the “usual voices” to include underrepresented communities. Engagement must be early, inclusive, and documented. 4) Use data-driven, publicly visible criteria. Decisions should not feel subjective or inconsistent. Apply clear metrics: traffic impact, school capacity, watershed impact, housing need, make those metrics public and easy to understand, and show how each proposal scores against those standards. When criteria are visible, trust increases, even when people disagree with the outcome. 5) Strengthen ethics and disclosure requirements. Require full disclosure of developer meetings and communications, publish a public log of interactions related to active land-use cases, and enforce strict recusal standards where conflicts exist. Sunlight reduces skepticism about influence. 6) Create a centralized, user-friendly public portal. Residents should be able to track applications in real time, view maps, plans, and timelines, submit comments and see others' input, and receive updates on decisions. If people can't easily navigate the process, it's not truly transparent. 7) Close the loop after decisions are made. Transparency doesn't end with a vote. Publish a post-decision summary explaining the outcome, show how community input shaped (or did not shape) the final decision—and why, and track project compliance over time and make that information public. Bottom line: Transparency is not just about letting people watch the process—it's about letting them understand it and influence it. If we combine early access to information, clear decision standards, documented community input, and strong ethics rules, we can rebuild trust in land-use decisions and ensure they reflect the full range of community perspectives—not just the loudest or most connected voices.

Makeda Scott, District 3

Transparency and public trust start with how decisions are made, not just the outcome. I would ensure that land use decisions are open and inclusive by proactively engaging residents early in the process, not after plans are already formed. That means holding accessible community meetings, providing clear and timely information, and creating multiple ways for people to participate and be heard. I also believe in consistent, proactive communication, sharing updates, explaining the “why” behind decisions, and making sure materials and data are easy to access and understand. Too often, residents feel decisions are made behind closed doors. I am committed to changing that by making the process more visible and accountable. I will ensure that my decisions are informed by data, community input, environmental impact, and long-term planning, not short-term pressures.

How would you ensure that your decisions, particularly with respect to land use, are open and transparent, and have considered all relevant views?

Nino Mangione, District 5

I will tell you for my part I believe in complete transparency. Many members of the current council have been less than transparent about their decisions. My operating procedure will be to review any project or proposal with any community association or other group of interested citizens before any actions are taken. I believe public, open meetings are essential in these matters regardless of differing opinions.

Shawn McIntosh, District 5

Transparency and accountability are core reasons I'm running for office. I believe residents deserve not just to be heard, but to know that their input is genuinely being considered before decisions are made, especially on major land use and development issues. Too often, communities feel brought into the process after plans are already largely shaped. I would prioritize early and meaningful public engagement by ensuring residents, community associations, environmental advocates, agricultural stakeholders, and other impacted groups are included at the beginning of conversations, when their feedback can still influence outcomes. I also support making land use decisions more accessible and understandable by improving public notice requirements, expanding access to meetings both in person and online, and ensuring that development proposals, supporting studies, timelines, and decision-making criteria are easy for residents to find and review. Good decision-making also requires looking at the full picture. That means carefully considering environmental impacts, infrastructure capacity, traffic, school overcrowding, watershed protection, fiscal impacts, housing needs, and community character. Years of coalition building and advocacy work have taught me the importance of bringing diverse voices to the table and finding common ground wherever possible. Even when people disagree, they deserve a transparent process, honest communication, and confidence that decisions are being made in the public interest, not behind closed doors.

David Marks, District 7

I pride myself on accessibility and openness. I constantly meet with community groups and other stakeholders. Our office created a Fifth District Community Advisory Council that brings together many neighborhood leaders to discuss issues and legislation. When making land use decisions, I actively consult documents such as the Master Plan that were developed after extensive input from the public.

Cari Santiago, District 7

Transparency begins with ending Councilmanic Courtesy; we need a Council that does not accept unopposed land use decisions. It's time we recognized that if the County fails, what happens in our individual districts will be irrelevant, so it is in our best interests to not only work together, but have a system that our residents have access to and can navigate. Secondly, we must overhaul public notification for land-use changes. Residents and property owners adjacent to proposed legislation/petitions deserve direct, timely notification that allows for meaningful dialogue and mediation before decisions are finalized.

Crystal Cody, District 8

Land-use decisions in Baltimore County have too often felt top-down. True transparency means engaging District 8 civic associations, waterfront improvement groups, and local environmental advocates before a bill is even drafted or a zoning change is introduced during the Comprehensive Zoning Map Process. We must end the practice of last-minute legislative amendments that bypass public scrutiny. By bringing community leaders, developers, and environmental experts to the table early, we ensure that growth in District 8 is predictable, transparent, and aligned with the community's vision.

How would you ensure that your decisions, particularly with respect to land use, are open and transparent, and have considered all relevant views?

Josh Sines, District 8

Transparency in land use decisions is critical. Residents should be informed early and have a meaningful opportunity to be heard. I support stronger public notification requirements, earlier community engagement, and clear access to information. I have been involved in situations where the process lacked transparency, and that needs to change.

Tim Fazenbaker, District 9

Transparency is fundamental. I will hold public meetings, respond directly to constituents (especially in District 9), publish clear positions online, and ensure all stakeholders—including residents, businesses, farmers, environmental groups, and taxpayers—have a fair chance to be heard before votes. No closed-door deals. As someone who's already attended council meetings and spoken out, my record shows willingness to challenge the status quo and put local people first. All relevant views matter, but final decisions must prioritize the well-being, safety, and prosperity of Baltimore County residents and taxpayers—not special interests.

Russ Mirabile, District 9

Assurance in open transparency is a MUST in all matters. I will NOT be crossing my fingers behind my back when I make a commitment.