

Poolesville Green - Climate questionnaire for candidates for county office, 2022

1. How high a priority should action on climate change be for Montgomery County? Should it be the top priority, among the top three, among the top ten, or not a top priority?

Climate change should be a top three priority for Montgomery County, along with ensuring an equitable recovery following the pandemic, including supporting our students and families, and working to build an adequate supply of affordable housing. Affordable housing should be tied to climate change solutions with density on transit lines and in commercial centers, where residents could find work, recreation and shopping within walking distance.

2. In 2017, Montgomery County declared a Climate Emergency, committing to reducing our county's greenhouse gas emissions 80% by 2027 and 100% by 2035. Do you support keeping these two commitments?

I support both of those commitments, but we currently are not on track to meet them. There is much we have to do during the next few years to become carbon neutral, and there will be hard choices to be made. I am committed to making those choices to help leave a better world behind for my children.

3. What main policies would you use to make these goals a reality - for example: generating the energy we use from clean sources within the county; importing clean energy from elsewhere; making our buildings and vehicles more energy-efficient; sequestering carbon through reforestation to offset our emissions, or something else?

This is going to require an “all of the above” approach. We need to transition away from fossil fuels for heating and cooking, which is why I co-sponsored Councilmember Riemer’s building electrification bill. Additionally, we must work towards generating more clean energy within our county with solar in the AR Zone, on rooftops, and over parking lots. We could start that project by placing solar panels on every county-owned property. This is a start to reducing the carbon emissions from our electricity demand. With more renewable generation of electricity, we can expand the electrification of our County fleet, and take serious measures through building codes and land-use policies to make electric vehicles accessible and affordable to residents at every economic level. Finally, we must put pressure on our lawmakers in Annapolis to address the challenges with transportation energy usage that we do not have the authority to fully address within the county. While it is critical we do all we can within our county, the reality is that greenhouse gas emissions have a global impact. So we suffer from the poor policies of neighboring jurisdictions. It’s important that we establish local, statewide, multi-state and national agreements and policies on reducing GHG emissions to meet our climate objectives.

4. Can we get to zero net emissions in 2035 without ending all fossil fuel use for buildings and vehicles by that year? If your answer is yes, please explain how.

While I fully support getting to net zero emissions in 2035, we are not on track to reach this goal without ending fossil fuel use in at least one sector. Eighty percent of our emissions come from housing and transportation. Clearly both must be targets. We have to act like this is an emergency. The time is past to talk about possible solutions. It is time right now to implement every solution.

5. Do you support a requirement that all new residential and commercial buildings in the County be powered by electricity by 2025?

Yes. I co-sponsored Councilmember Riemer's legislation that pushes all commercial buildings to be powered by electricity because we have to address the carbon emissions from both commercial and residential buildings in our county.

6. Do you support a requirement that all new motor vehicles sold in the County (ie, cars, trucks and motorcycles) be powered by electricity by 2025?

The Montgomery County Charter would not allow this type of change. However, I would support incentives to help move people to transition to electric vehicles and would support efforts at the state level to move in this direction. I would also consider supporting a charter revision to meet this goal, given the opportunity to review.

7. Should Montgomery County commit to increasing our forest cover, currently about 3395, to 50% by 2050?

Forest cover provides numerous benefits to the county in terms of stormwater management, carbon sequestration, and dissipation of the heat island effect. I believe we need to increase the county forest cover as much as possible and I support the 50 percent goal by 2050.

8. Do you support changing the zoning rules for Montgomery County's Agricultural Reserve, which currently impose severe limits on community solar projects, so that we can create 150 such projects (that would average about 12 acres each) in the Ag Reserve by 2035? The state of Maine adopted a law last year creating "extended producer responsibility" for packaging, making businesses responsible for taking back and recycling the packaging for the products they produce. Would you support Montgomery County adopting such a law?

I support changing the soil classification limitations in our zoning laws for solar in the AR Zone. Based on my review of ZTA 20-01 during our extensive work on the issue in Council, I believe the soil classification issue is the primary issue

restricting community solar projects, and I voted to remove those limitations before the full Council. I think it is important to retain the conditional use process for approvals because the reality is that the Agricultural Reserve does provide numerous environmental and economic benefits to the County that should be balanced against the need for more solar. I also believe that we should focus on increasing solar adoption in other parts of the County, where there are ample existing opportunities to create community solar projects, and encourage the expansion of residential and commercial adaptation to solar.

On single-use packaging: I have a draft bill that I may introduce in the fall that will require extended producer responsibility for single use plastic bottles. I am currently working with the Department of Environmental Protection to assess the impacts and implementation for policies that will address single use plastic containers.

9. Do you support Montgomery County implementing mandatory curbside collection of compostable materials?

Yes. Our County Department of Environmental Protection has been running a pilot for such a program in select neighborhoods. I believe we should scale up this program and make it countywide.

10. How often should Montgomery County release updated data on our greenhouse gas emissions, so that elected officials can be held accountable for progress or lack of it towards the 2027 and 2035 goals? Should it be annually, every other year, every third year, or only in 2027 and 2035, and why?

I am absolutely committed to full transparency. Residents should have information on this that is accessible and easy to absorb, because it is crucial for residents and elected officials to understand where we are and what more we need to do to meet our goals related to greenhouse gas emissions. I have been a proponent of releasing data as often as possible to the public. Without data it is easy to evade real change related to practices that are harmful. Without data educating residents, it is more difficult to move the needle on the progress we must make in order to maintain the climate of Montgomery County (and our broader community – the State of Maryland, the Mid-Atlantic, the United States, and finally our planet) so we can continue to thrive on our Earth.