

The People's Voice, LLC

Ethics Ballot™

3600 Saint Johns Lane, Suite D, Ellicott City, MD21042

ETHICS BALLOT QUESTIONNAIRE

Howard County General Election 2022

County Council

Congratulations on your decision to run for Howard County Council. The People's Voice is a civic/political organization in Howard and Montgomery Counties. We have over 4,000 members in Howard County and sponsor the non-partisan Ethics Ballot. If you would like to seek endorsement please return this Questionnaire to EthicsBallot@Gmail.com by midnight September 20, 2022. Please note that all questionnaires are published on the website, www.EthicsBallot.com. We will be in touch regarding endorsement dates soon after getting the questionnaires back. We pride ourselves on working hard for our endorsed candidates, and look forward to hearing your positions on important County issues. THANK YOU so very much for your time!

Be sure to address all aspects of each question.

Name: [Joan U Pontius](#)

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Educational History:

- Bachelor's Degree Biology - University of Pittsburgh
- Master's Degree - Biomedical Engineering - University of Miami
- Doctorate Degree - Biology - Free University of Brussels
- Certification - Project Management Professional (PMP)
- Languages Spoken/Other Skills/Relevant Experience
 - Native language English
 - Conversational French, Dutch
- Over 20 year career as data analyst/project manager, working with a wide variety of stakeholders on highly technical subject matter.

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Resident of Howard County for 23 years. Neighborhood activist, providing testimony at county zoning and State legislation hearings, attending Board of Education meetings, writing letters to county officials, and exchanging information on online community forums such as Howard County Citizens Association. Familiar with county zoning regulations, appealing of decisions, Zoning Regulation Amendments (ZRA).

1. Why are you running for this office?

I have become concerned that Howard County's rapid residential and economic growth is not sustainable and is eroding our environment and quality of life. The devastating floods of Ellicott City in 2016 and 2018 resulted in loss of lives, property, and livelihood, and yet the county continues to approve the conversion of surrounding natural buffers to housing. Forests and agricultural properties are being cleared for housing and commercial use. The lack of infrastructure for these changes results in over-crowded schools and traffic congestion.

I feel the root cause of this is, in part, monied interests corrupting our governing process. In March, I saw that our county council representative was running unopposed from both parties, and decided to join the race.

2. Have you signed the No Dark Money, No Developer Money pledge or signed up for the Citizen Election Fund? If NOT how do you eliminate the appearance of conflicts?

Yes I have signed the pledge, and am using the Citizens Election Fund.

3. If you are elected, what are your top priorities for 2022?

- 1) General plan. Next year, the county council will implement the General Plan to prepare for the next ten years of growth. The decisions made next year must be made with our residents in mind, rather than outside interests.
- 2) Schools. We must continue funding schools to reduce the backlog of deferred maintenance and needed construction. We also must help school staff by having each new housing development include homes that are in the price range of our teachers and other essential workers.
- 3) Government accountability, especially with respect to zoning and land use. Residents count on stability in their neighborhoods, and this is eroded when sudden changes in zoning allow new uses, or when interpretations of zoning regulations are arbitrary and capricious.

4. What do you believe are the strengths and weaknesses of the current County Council? How have you demonstrated your ability to work with people who have diverse opinions and party affiliations?

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Strengths - The members of our County Council now have 4 years experience, and so they are familiar with their role as county councilmembers. Deb Yung and Liz Walsh are both lawyers, providing them a firm understanding of legal issues.

Weaknesses - Loss the trust of the public due to campaign contributions to some members from special interests.

Throughout my career, I have worked with people from a wide variety of backgrounds. I lived in Belgium for 8 years, with its multiple specialized political parties for everything from language, to religion, to age groups. That experience opened my eyes to the variety of political expression. Coming from a family of 5 children, and even more cousins, our family represents a wide variety of political beliefs. We're all speaking to one another, which I believe is an indication of the atmosphere of open communication which I was raised in.

5. What are your funding priorities for the County? What changes do you believe should be made compared to past budget decisions?

Funding our schools is and will remain the biggest budget item for the county.

For changes:

- 1) Infrastructure costs for new residential development need to be passed on to those who profit from that new development, ie, developers. We need to review impact fees for schools as well for other infrastructure costs such as fire and rescue and police, rather than passing on these costs to residents as tax hikes.
- 2) I would like to review business incentives to make sure they're reaching the businesses of our residents, rather than incentives for outside interests to relocate here.
- 3) We can't use affordable housing as a bargaining chip for other projects such as a multimillion dollar cultural center. Any new housing needs to reflect the needs of our residents, no strings attached.

6. Do you feel the amount of planned residential growth in the County should be increased or decreased? Explain why and include any changes you believe should occur to the Adequate Public Facilities Ordinance (APFO) that regulates the timing of development.

Residential growth needs to be curtailed for two reasons. First is that the infrastructure is not currently in place to support it, and increased growth is leading to crowding of schools. Secondly, residential parcels entail high costs to the county in terms of services provided compared to, for example, commercial, industrial, or agriculture. These costs are passed on to residents in the form of higher taxes. I feel that the county needs to reassess the dogma that residential growth pays for itself.

The APFO is clearly inadequate, since our schools are still overcrowded. I would support increasing the APFO wait time from 4 to 7 years. We also need to review loopholes that allow developers to by-pass the

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requirements of APFO. APFO could be further strengthened by including not only roads and schools but other public facilities, such as fire and rescue, police, or even libraries and open spaces for recreation.

7. The upcoming development planning changes called HoCo By Design had four density scenarios. Which one do you believe is best and why? Are there any changes to residential or commercial land use you would like to see in the plan before it is implemented?

<https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/d70e5e47028542d6bfb120bc317782a2>

The four density scenarios represent a range of planned growth, with Scenario A allowing growth under current zoning regulations, while Scenario D is the most aggressive growth which would expand public service area into rural areas.

I feel that Scenario A most closely matches the concerns of our residents. Even with current regulations, growth has outpaced the building of infrastructure to support it, resulting in crowded schools, traffic congestion and increased taxes.

I would like to see changes that minimize the negative impact of use on neighboring properties—including light, noise, traffic, and stormwater runoff. We also need to review exemptions from requirements to determine whether the exemptions reflect the needs of our residents, or those of special interests.

8. What, if any, new stormwater management or forest conservation regulations do you believe should be in the General Plan?

Before getting to specific regulations, my first suggestion would be to use very specific terms in our zoning regulations and the General Plan. Public trust is eroded when ambiguous wording in regulations can be twisted to fit the use of special interests. Stormwater management, for example, can refer to retaining water to avoid runoff, but it can also mean diverting water away from structures. If a new development diverts runoff away from the homes into our streams leading to erosion, is that stormwater management?

I am for strengthening forest conservation and reducing runoff causing the erosion of the banks of our county's waterways. We also need to consider the importance of groundwater recharge to replenish our aquifers.

The regulations needed to do this will require a legal framework. Our regulations need to reflect environmental stewardship including recognizing the importance of established forests not only as a buffer for stormwater run-off but also for preserving land for wildlife and recreation. We need more than tree giveaways to offset the negative impact of clear-cutting established forests for residential development.

9. What positions do you hold regarding the current levels of low and moderate income housing in the County? What changes to specific policies, that the Council can legislate, would you sponsor or support?

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We need more reasonably priced homes, not only for low and moderate income residents, but for anyone who would like to live in a smaller home. I also feel these more economical homes have to be available across the county, not only in specific areas, which leads to segregated communities.

Regarding policy related to Moderate Income Housing Units (MIHU), I would support lowering the square foot requirement for home eligibility. For example a three bedroom house of less than 1,680 square feet is too small to be included in the program. Homes in the 1950s were much smaller, and—especially in view of the efforts to reduce our carbon footprint and home maintenance costs—any housing program should include these smaller sizes.

<https://compasscaliforniablog.com/have-american-homes-changed-much-over-the-years-take-a-look/>

10. Do you believe that County funded housing trust funds should be utilized to provide affordable housing? If so, should they be restricted to government usage and not private projects? Why or why not?

Throughout the country, there is a housing crisis and it definitely is time to review options for providing housing for all our residents. However, we'd have to monitor any program to verify that public spending went to providing help for those who need it, and to avoid the program being hijacked by special interests.

11. How do you feel about large-scale commercial uses on Preserved Agricultural land, such as solar panels or mulching, beyond farm uses?

Our farms need to be profitable so that owners keep their land, rather than convert it to residential developments. However, regulations for preserved land often carry requirements of agricultural use, and solar farms and mulching clearly are not agricultural. New uses become problematic when they generate negative impact such as excessive traffic—especially from trucks, risk of groundwater contamination, and noxious fumes.

Farms need to have flexibility in using solar panels, for example on their roofs, or even in fields if it helps shade plants from too much sunlight. On the other hand, what is the plan in 25 years when solar panels age, and perhaps crack? Will their metals leach into the field? What is the plan to remove aged panels or pay for their upkeep? Any negative impact of aged panels might take decades to become evident. As our society and technology changes, our regulations will evolve.

12. Do you support the creation of an independent office of inspector general in Howard County?

Yes. We need to restore trust in our government.

13. What are your views on current County taxes and services? Are there any taxes you would propose to change? How would services or programs be impacted by your decisions?

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Our taxes have moved from the lowest in the state 20 years ago, to now the highest. The common perception that this is due to the costs of increasing infrastructure to support residential growth. These are passed on to residents without an increase in their service.

One service area I would like to review is our trash fees and services. Currently, there is a lack of transparency as to how much of our recycling is actually sent to landfills, while we pay for both trash and recycle trucks to make their rounds every week. Similarly, the county is expanding to compost pick up without a clear cost-to-benefit analysis compared to alternatives, for example, local composting centers.

14. What do you believe the County should be doing to address climate change concerns?

We need to expand our Climate Action Plan to include items beyond green house gas emissions. Among other things include:

- 1) Emergency preparation for extreme weather events, including stormwater management, but also brownouts in the summer due to excessive use of air conditioning. Brownouts could become more problematic as the use of electric vehicles expands.
- 2) Reduction of carbon footprint not only by energy efficient building standards, but by building design. I am concerned that the fashion of tall ceilings and expansive lobbies offset other energy efficiency measures.
- 3) Secure our supply chain with respect to food by supporting agricultural production of our farmers.

By Authority: The People's Voice, Lisa Markovitz Treasurer