

## County Council At-Large Candidate Questionnaire

**Lelia True** · Candidate for Montgomery County Council At-Large · Democratic Primary, June 23, 2026

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### Transportation

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**Transportation is critical to our economic growth. How are you going to work with the County Executive and the Governor to address the congestion on the Upper I-270 corridor?**

The Upper I-270 corridor is the economic spine of the Upcounty, and right now congestion is costing us employers, talent, and tax base. I will work with the County Executive and the Governor as a partner who comes to the table with operational discipline, not just a wish list. That means pressing the state to deliver the long-overdue 270 improvements on a real, published schedule with milestones the public can hold us all to, the same way I have run other large projects to deadline. It also means refusing to treat highway capacity and transit as an either/or fight. The Upcounty needs both: targeted relief on 270 alongside the full Bus Rapid Transit buildout on Route 355 and the Corridor Cities corridor so that workers and employers actually have a reliable alternative. My approach is to align the county's capital priorities with the state's so we stop losing years to jurisdictions pointing fingers at each other, and to make sure Upcounty congestion is treated as the economic emergency it is not an afterthought to the lower county.

### Economic Growth and Taxes

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**Our County budget is outpacing growth of our population and our business economy. What concrete steps will you take to invite investment to Montgomery County — for both small and large businesses — to grow the economy and maintain the level of services in our county budget? Where does the Upcounty fit into your plans?**

You can grow the economy and control costs at the same time, not one at the expense of the other. My concrete steps start with a Business Express single permitting portal with a mandated 30-day turnaround and a dedicated small-business ombudsman, so a business can actually open or expand without losing a year to fragmented county agencies. I would pair that with a tiered, clawback-protected incentive program tied to creating 100-plus jobs at above-median wages, so we stop bleeding employers to Northern Virginia and Howard County, and with public-private investment in move-in-ready lab and flex space for the life-sciences firms we keep losing for lack of facilities.

The Upcounty is central to this, not peripheral. Germantown, Clarksburg, and Gaithersburg have the land, the I-270 biotech adjacency, and the workforce that the lower county no longer has room for. My plan is to direct employer-incentive tiers and life-sciences infrastructure investment specifically toward Upcounty job centers, because that is where the county's next generation of growth has to happen if our budget is going to keep pace with the services residents expect.

**In one sentence, what is the biggest mistake the current Executive and Council has made regarding the county's economic growth?**

They have let the cost of doing business here — fragmented permitting, regulatory drag, and a tax-and-spend reflex — outrun our ability to attract and keep employers, so the budget keeps growing while the economy that pays for it does not.

**The Germantown Master Plan previously called for over 60,000 jobs in Germantown, which did not come to fruition because Upcounty infrastructure needs have been ignored for decades. How would you reverse this result to grow Upcounty job centers?**

You cannot recruit 60,000 jobs to a place you have not built the roads, transit, water, and lab space to support — employers go where the infrastructure is already on the ground. Reversing decades of neglect means finally sequencing Upcounty infrastructure ahead of, not behind, the growth we say we want: getting real movement on the 270 corridor, extending BRT into Germantown and Clarksburg, and investing in the spec lab and flex space that biotech and advanced-manufacturing employers need to move in. I would also use targeted incentives and a fast-tracked permitting lane specifically for Upcounty job-center sites, so that when an employer is choosing between Germantown and a competing county, Montgomery is the easy yes. This is fundamentally a project-management problem — aligning capital dollars, state partners, and private investment around a published plan with deadlines — and that is exactly the kind of large, complex execution I have done my entire career.

## Public Safety

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**Businesses are increasingly concerned about juvenile crime trends in the Upcounty. What changes, if any, would you pursue in addressing crime, particularly among juveniles?**

Business owners and families deserve to feel safe, and that has to be the baseline — full stop. On juvenile crime I believe in accountability paired with prevention, because the data is clear that neither alone works. On the accountability side, I support a fully staffed police department with the resources to respond quickly and consistently, and I support proven tools like the Drone as a First Responder program reaching further into the Upcounty. On the prevention side, I would invest in the things that actually keep kids from entering the system in the first place: after-school and summer programming, mentorship, mental-health support in schools, and real intervention for repeat offenders before patterns harden. As someone who has spent years coaching and mentoring young people in this county, I know that structure and high expectations change outcomes. The county's job is to deliver both a credible response when crime happens and the off-ramps that keep our kids from getting there.

## Housing

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**Employers cite workforce housing as a barrier to attracting talent. How would you expand diverse and attainable housing options — especially near Upcounty job centers?**

Housing affordability is one of my top priorities, and the core problem is simple: it has become too hard and too expensive to build the homes people actually need. A household needs roughly \$270,000 to afford a median-priced home here while the median couple earns about \$131,000 — that gap is why employers cannot attract talent. My signature proposal is an Essential Worker Housing Initiative: a coordinated, countywide public-private partnership with major employers to produce workforce housing at scale, combining employer-assisted housing, county-backed down-payment assistance, and zoning incentives near job centers. For the Upcounty specifically, that means fast-tracking workforce housing along the I-270 biotech

corridor and Route 355, streamlining the permitting that adds months and thousands of dollars to every project, and accelerating the More Housing N.O.W. framework. We need more of both market-rate and subsidized supply — right now we are producing too little of either.

## Education

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**The Chamber supports investment in Montgomery College, the Universities at Shady Grove, and MCPS. What is your vision for partnering with these institutions to strengthen the county's talent pipeline? What strategies will you pursue to keep young professionals in Montgomery County, especially in Upcounty communities?**

Our colleges and universities are one of the county's greatest competitive advantages, and we underuse them. My vision is to treat Montgomery College and the Universities at Shady Grove as active partners in economic development — building direct pipelines between their programs and the employers we are recruiting, especially in life sciences, IT, and the skilled trades, so a degree or certificate here leads to a job here. That means county-facilitated apprenticeships and internships, alignment between curriculum and the actual hiring needs of Upcounty employers, and using these institutions as the anchor for the talent ecosystem I want to build around the 270 corridor.

Keeping young professionals here comes down to two things: jobs and the ability to afford to live near them. That is why my economic-growth and workforce-housing plans are the same conversation as my education plan. If we grow Upcounty job centers and finally produce attainable housing near them, young graduates will not have to leave for Northern Virginia or Frederick to build a life. As an educator and Head of School myself, I know these institutions are ready to be partners — the county just has to lead.

**Would you hold the budget at the absolute legal minimum (a 'no-growth' MOE budget) until the Board of Education agrees to a third-party forensic audit of central-office management? How would you defend that to MCEA — or, if not, what strategy will you employ to ensure a return on the taxpayer's investment in MCPS?**

I would not lead by issuing an ultimatum on day one, but I will absolutely insist on a forensic, third-party audit of MCPS central-office management — and I am prepared to use the budget as leverage to get it. With a \$3.6B school budget, the taxpayers and, frankly, the classroom deserve to know where every dollar goes, and an independent audit is a reasonable, professional management practice, not an attack on anyone. That is exactly how I have run large organizations: you fund the mission, you cut the waste, and you never confuse spending more with delivering more. If MCEA frames accountability as an 'attack on educators,' my answer is that I am the candidate fighting hardest for the classroom — for teacher retention, mental-health staffing, and special education — and the way you protect those priorities is by finding and redirecting the dollars buried in administration. I would rather get the audit through partnership and a credible threat to hold the line than through a blanket no-growth budget that risks hurting students. But fiscal accountability is non-negotiable, and I will hold MCPS accountable for results above MOE.

## Yes / No Questions

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### Education

**YES** — Do you support the reinstatement of uniformed School Resource Officers to local high schools?

**YES** — Do you support funding MCPS above the Maintenance of Effort? (Yes — when it is tied to measurable results and accountability, with the dollars directed to the classroom.)

**YES** — Do you support holding MCPS to higher account for their portion of our County budget, particularly those funds above MOE?

**YES** — Would you support opening a conversation with the State Board of Education about oversight of the MCPS budget and accountability?

### **Public Safety**

**YES** — Do you support the expansion of the Drone as a First Responder program further into the Upcounty?

**YES** — Will you support MCPD's use of facial recognition technology for investigating violent crimes? (Yes — limited to investigating serious violent crimes, with strong oversight and privacy safeguards.)

**YES, YES** — Will you commit to a one-time retention bonus for all sworn officers with 5+ years of experience to address the staffing vacancy crisis? **I said yes twice on purpose**

### **Housing**

**YES** — Do you support repeal of the Rent Stabilization legislation, given the near-100% drop in rental construction permits? (Yes — the collapse in permits shows the current policy is choking the supply we desperately need; it must be repealed or substantially reformed to bring builders back.)

**YES** — Missing Middle Zoning: Do you support allowing duplexes and triplexes in neighborhoods currently zoned strictly for single-family homes? (Yes — focused near transit and job centers, with attention to community input.)

**YES** — Developer Incentives: Would you support Transit-Oriented Development that grants enterprise-zone-style status to developers building near Metro or Purple Line stations?

**YES** — Eviction Notice: Do you support the 2026 requirement that landlords provide a minimum of two weeks' notice before an eviction can proceed?

### **Economic Development & Taxation**

**YES** — Will you pledge to vote no on any property tax increase that uses the 'school funding loophole' to bypass the Charter's unanimous-vote requirement?

**YES** — Special Taxing Districts: Do you support the creation of new Special Taxing Districts for residents and businesses to fund infrastructure projects? (Yes — where they are locally supported and tied to clearly defined infrastructure benefits, with transparency on cost.)

### **Oversight & Quality of Life**

**NO** — Leaf Blower Enforcement: Do you support 'noise code inspectors' issuing the maximum \$500 fine to homeowners and landscapers still using gas-powered leaf blowers? (No — punitive maximum fines on small landscapers and homeowners are the wrong approach; phase-ins and support beat heavy-handed enforcement.)

**NO** — Would you have voted for the legislation banning gas-powered leaf blowers as written? (No — I share the goal of reducing noise and emissions, but this was rolled out without enough transition support for the small landscaping businesses it hit hardest.)

**NO** — Will you vote no on any capital project that adds new lanes of travel for gas-powered vehicles (excluding dedicated bus lanes)? (No — I will not take a blanket pledge against road capacity; the Upcounty needs both targeted highway relief and transit, and I will judge each project on its merits.)

**NO** — Would you have voted to remove M-83 from the transportation master plan? (No — removing the long-planned eastern arterial without a real alternative left Clarksburg's growth and traffic needs unaddressed.)

**NO** — Do you support the recent charter amendment reducing the County Executive's term limit from three terms to two? (Voters have spoken and I respect their decision; on the underlying question, I did not support shortening it — accountability should come from elections, not arbitrary limits.)

## One Last Question

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### **What do you feel is the most important issue for Upcounty business owners and residents to consider during this election season?**

Affordability and growth are the same issue, and the Upcounty is where the county's future will be won or lost. We have a budget growing faster than the economy that funds it, a housing crisis pricing out the workers employers need, and infrastructure that has been neglected for decades while we promised tens of thousands of jobs we never built the roads or transit to support. The most important thing for Upcounty voters to consider is whether a candidate has actually run large, complex organizations and delivered results — or whether they are offering more of the same politics that got us here. I have commanded soldiers, managed a \$190M operation, cut real waste, and built a major project the right way in this county. That operational experience is exactly what this moment demands, and it is what I will bring to the Council for the Upcounty.

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### **Lelia True**

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