

2022 HoCo candidate questionnaire

Our Revolution Howard County - county council & executive endorsement requests

Name *

Joan Pontius

Campaign Website

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Why are you running for county office? What have you done in recent years to benefit Howard County (e.g. civic engagement, testimony, activism, etc.)?

I want to represent the public's concerns regarding the future direction of the county. Over my 23 years in Howard County, my interactions with county and state officials has included testifying at conditional use hearings, providing input for proposed site plans, filing zoning violation complaints, filing illegal sign complaints. I am an activist in our small neighborhood, keeping neighbors informed of county decisions that affect our community.

What actions would your office take on any of OR's 6 platform issues? <https://ourrev.us/Platform2022>

Protect Voting Rights & Get Money Out of Politics - I would support the Citizens Election Fund.

Fight for \$15 and a Union. I support HoCo's recent increase of their minimum wage to \$15/hour.

Climate action: - I support expanding energy efficiency standards for buildings to include not only energy efficient materials, but also reduced total usage.

Reproductive rights. The SCOTUS has brought this issue back on the forefront. With the possibility of our federal government being unwilling to protect these rights, state and local governance must be willing to defend private decisions regarding reproductive choices.

Are you using the Citizen's Election Fund (CEF) for financing? If not, why not? Are you accepting campaign contributions from corporate interests, such as property developers or their associates?

I hope to reach the June 4 deadline for fundraising requirements needed to qualify for CEF matching funds. In addition, I have taken the No Developer/No Dark Money pledge and will not take donations from corporations or PACs.

Please identify a few serious challenges facing Howard County that your office would address over the next two years. What steps would you take, what obstacles do you anticipate, and how can we overcome them?

The biggest challenge is the negative impact of the conversion of the county's open spaces to commercial and residential use. This directly causes other challenges including crowded schools, traffic, and environmental consequences such as excessive storm water run off, and loss of recreational areas and loss of the scenic beauty of our county. I hope to play a role in retaining our open spaces.

What changes would you make to Howard County taxes?

Over the past 20 years, taxes have gone from the lowest in the state to the highest. I would like to re-examine the belief that a larger tax base will lead to lower taxes, because this has clearly not taken place. I would also like to review the costs of the various financial incentives and tax breaks that the county offers, to determine if these are cost effective.

What would you do to make housing more affordable for low-income residents?

The acres of residential properties "starting at \$900k" are not affordable to the majority of HoCo residents. I'd like to see each new development consist of a variety of housing that reflects the needs of our residents. I'd also like to see an end to housing that, through price, income, or age-restrictions, leads to segregated communities. A wider variety of housing options combined with our recent raise in minimum wage will ease some of the struggles low-residents have in finding housing, and hopefully reduce the need for subsidized housing.

How would you improve transportation and reduce traffic congestion in the county in an equitable and sustainable manner? Please identify priorities and funding mechanisms.

The conversion of our open spaces to residential and commercial properties leads to traffic congestion. I want to see the subdivision process of our Department of Zoning "use land and buildings in ways which avoid traffic congestion and which provide for pedestrian movement". I'd also like to see "Adequate and efficient transportation by a variety of means, including alternatives to the automobile." These quote texts are taken from the county's land development regulations, and I feel these have been ignored.

How would you increase police accountability, decrease racial disparities in policing, and maintain public safety? Do you support a reallocation of resources to medical or social services as front-line responders?

Howard County has a newly established Police Accountability Board for the purpose of various issues including trends in policing. This will be helpful in identifying problems and proposing their resolution. Sometimes an emergency requires social services rather than law enforcement. Providing these services separately from law enforcement could benefit Howard County not only by providing a more specialized response, but also by allowing our law enforcement professionals to focus on law enforcement issues.

How would you engage racially and economically marginalized communities to address equitable community policies? How would you ensure more impacted communities have a voice in county commissions?

Howard County has a RACIAL EQUITY TASK FORCE and I would review their recommendations in addressing these important issues.

What should county government do to promote sustainable and equitable economic growth and job opportunities?

The county has increased its minimum wage to \$15/hour for 2023, which some studies suggest would be enough for a household of two working adults to support themselves in Howard County. This is a great first step in addressing economic disparities in the county, and this effort needs to continue. This wage will need to increase with the cost of living.

What should the county do to improve healthcare beyond what the state and federal government does, in the short-run and long-run?

I fully support the county's response during the Covid pandemic. We will need to stay vigilant in this regard.

In view of the SCOTUS potentially removing protections of personal reproduction choices, the county may need to take a stand in protecting the privacy rights of its citizens and access to medical care.

Do you support changes to county voting methods, such as ranked choice, approval voting, or proportional representation?

Yes.

What are your top priorities to address environmental justice, sustainability, and nature conservation?

These three topics all rely on stringent land use regulations and preservation, which I would fully support.

Do you support eliminating natural gas in new household construction?

I would be open to considering it. I am aware of the environmental destruction the extraction of natural gas can lead to, as well as the dangers of gas leaks within a home and through pipelines. However, any legislation would have to be effective. It could prove pointless to target new construction in eliminating the use of natural gas, if a homeowner can request a connection after taking ownership of the house.

How would you address electric car recharging stations in the county?

I am for the use of stations by county vehicles and other uses that benefit us all. However, I am against BGE providing free electricity at charging stations for vehicles that are too costly for the majority of residents. I see this electric-give-away as being inconsistent with federal regulations of the pricing of public utilities. I would like to review the county's incentivization of EVs and BGE's pricing policy with a view to bring policies in line with federal standards.

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