

**MCMC: MoCo Council Candidates Questionnaire - 2026 Primary
Responses from:
Jud Ashman, Candidate, Montgomery County Council, District 3**

Question 1 Topic: Civil Rights Montgomery County is one of the most diverse counties in the nation. Accordingly, many MoCo residents who are members of the Arab and Muslim community have engaged in public protests but have unfortunately experienced a curtailing of their first amendment rights to free speech. This includes doxxing, student and teacher suspensions, unequal response by local police.

1. What are your thoughts on the county's response thus far, in light of what was just shared? What has worked? What has not worked?

Montgomery County's diversity is one of its greatest strengths, and protecting the civil rights of all residents—including members of our Arab and Muslim communities—is a core responsibility of local government.

When any community feels their First Amendment rights are applied unevenly, it undermines trust. There should always be transparency in how policies are enforced. Harassment and/or doxxing are unacceptable and we need to ensure victims have clear avenues for support.

Every resident should feel confident they can speak, assemble, and advocate without fear of retaliation or unequal treatment. That's both a constitutional obligation and a moral one.

2. What specific steps will you take to protect the free speech of residents and students, regardless of their positions on issues?

I will push for clear, viewpoint-neutral policies across county agencies and in partnership with MCPS that affirm students' and residents' First Amendment rights. Everyone should know what is protected and where the boundaries are.

What is your stance on the county's response to peaceful advocacy and protests?

Peaceful advocacy and protest are fundamental rights, and the County has an obligation to protect them—consistently and without regard to viewpoint.

How will you protect the free speech rights of residents on local and global issues?

Protecting free speech—whether on local or global issues—starts with a simple principle: the government must remain neutral on viewpoint while actively safeguarding the right to speak, assemble, and advocate.

Question 2 Topic: Non-Profit Support Many Muslim-led non-profits, like MCMF (Montgomery County Muslim Foundation), provide critical social services that the county cannot. Some may not even be aware of grant funding opportunities let alone have experience applying for competitive grants.

1. How will you ensure an equitable approach to communicating and granting funding for faith-based community organizations?

I will support a clear, standardized grant process with well-defined criteria that are viewpoint- and faith-neutral, so all organizations understand how decisions are made and can compete on equal footing.

We should broaden our outreach. I would work to ensure that funding opportunities are communicated widely—through multilingual materials, partnerships with community organizations, and engagement with faith leaders—so smaller or newer groups aren't left out.

And I would encourage capacity-building support—such as technical assistance or grant-writing workshops—so organizations with fewer resources can successfully apply.

Question 3 Topic: Housing and Displacement Montgomery County is becoming increasingly unaffordable.

1. What do you propose to prevent current skyrocketing housing costs across Montgomery County, especially with residents facing record high interest rates?

The only sustainable way to bring down housing costs is to increase supply while reducing the cost of building and preserving housing.

My first focus will be on accelerating production—streamlining permitting, reducing unnecessary delays, and making it easier to build a range of housing types, including missing-middle and transit-oriented development.

We need to do what we can to lower construction costs. That means reviewing regulations, fees, and processes that add time and expense without improving outcomes.

I'd support efforts to strengthen public-private partnerships to expand both market-rate and subsidized affordable housing, using county resources strategically to unlock more units.

For residents in immediate need, I support targeted, temporary assistance—such as down payment support or emergency rental assistance—so people can stay in their homes while supply catches up.

The bottom line is that we help residents most when we give them housing choice—and that requires building more housing, faster and more efficiently.

2. What is your plan to prevent the displacement of immigrant and low-income families, who have been disproportionately impacted?

Preventing displacement requires both immediate support and long-term solutions.

I support emergency rental assistance. In fact, we just more than doubled this line item in our budget in Gaithersburg and it will remain a priority for me as a County Councilmember.

We should look for ways to preserve existing affordable housing by investing in the rehabilitation of naturally occurring affordable units and partnering with nonprofit, mission-driven organizations to maintain long-term affordability.

The long term solution is, of course, to increase the housing supply. This is essential. Building more housing at all income levels—especially near transit and jobs—reduces the pressure that drives displacement.

The goal is to keep families stably housed today while creating a more affordable, inclusive housing market for the future.

Question 4 Topic: Housing and Displacement For many families (1st generation, 2nd generation, immigrant, etc.), transit is a lifeline.

1. What are your specific plans to improve the reliability of public transportation (such as the Ride-On bus system and completion of Purple Line, and more), as well as pedestrian safety in all parts of the county, but especially in the Up-County region?

For transit, I will prioritize more frequent and reliable Ride On service by aligning routes with demand, improving on-time performance, and investing in tools like dedicated bus lanes and transit signal priority where feasible. I strongly support completing the Purple Line and ensuring it is fully integrated with local bus networks to maximize its impact.

We also need to close service gaps in the Upcounty by expanding coverage and strengthening connections to job centers, schools, and transit hubs.

On pedestrian safety, I support a data-driven approach that targets high-injury corridors with better crossings, sidewalks, lighting, and traffic calming measures.

Question 5 Topic: Healthcare Access Health insurance - and healthcare costs generally - continue to rise, making access to healthcare nearly impossible for some in our county.

1. What legislative measures will you support to bridge the gap in healthcare access for uninsured or under-insured residents in our community?

I will support efforts to expand access to coverage through state and federal programs, including maximizing enrollment in Medicaid and Affordable Care Act plans, and strengthening outreach so eligible residents are not left uninsured.

At the local level, I will prioritize funding for community health clinics and nonprofit providers that serve uninsured and under-insured residents, including support for preventive care, mental health services, and dental care.

I also support expanding language access and culturally competent care so residents can navigate the system and receive appropriate treatment.

To address costs, I will advocate for policies that improve price transparency and reduce barriers to care, including support for prescription affordability initiatives.

Finally, I will look to strengthen partnerships with hospitals, nonprofits, and community organizations to ensure care is accessible, coordinated, and responsive to community needs.

2. What legislation could you introduce or expand to bolster funding for free or reduced cost health clinics run by nonprofits in our county, such as medical clinics run by MCC (Muslim Community Center) and ICM (Islamic Center of Maryland)?

I will focus on strengthening and expanding the County's support for nonprofit clinics that provide essential care to uninsured and under-insured residents.

That includes increasing funding for the Montgomery Cares program and similar safety-net initiatives that partner with community clinics to deliver primary and preventive care. I would also support creating a dedicated grant program for nonprofit clinics to help cover operating costs, expand hours, and add services like mental health and dental care.

Question 6 Topic: County Budget Fiscal responsibility and balancing the budget in coordination with the rest of the County Council and County Executive is a paramount responsibility of the County At-Large seat.

1. Do you support tax cuts, tax increases, or maintaining the status quo?

I do not support broad tax increases as the default solution to closing budget gaps. Residents are already feeling the strain of rising costs, and we have a responsibility to demonstrate that government is operating as efficiently and effectively as possible before asking for more.

My approach is to maintain stability in tax rates while focusing on growing the tax base. That means supporting smart economic development, expanding our commercial base, and encouraging job growth so we can generate additional revenue without placing a greater burden on residents.

At the same time, we must take a hard look at spending—prioritizing core services, improving performance, and identifying areas where we can do more with existing resources.

That said, I would consider targeted, time-limited revenue options only in truly exceptional circumstances, and only with clear accountability and a demonstrated need.

The goal is a balanced approach: protect taxpayers, grow the economy, and ensure we can sustainably fund the services residents rely on.

2. Regardless of your approach, how would you propose paying for many of the county's programs?

The most sustainable way to fund County programs is to grow our tax base—by supporting smart economic development, attracting and retaining businesses, and encouraging redevelopment that generates long-term revenue without overburdening residents.

At the same time, we have to be honest that tough decisions are sometimes required. When they are, I prioritize core services: education, public safety, public works, transportation, and critical safety net programs that residents rely on every day.

That means aligning spending with results, evaluating programs based on outcomes, and ensuring we are using taxpayer dollars as effectively as possible. It also means leveraging partnerships and outside funding where we can, to stretch local resources further.