



## Protecting and Preserving Our Environment

As County Executive, I would work hard to make Anne Arundel County a place where every resident can breathe clean air, drink clean water, enjoy our natural spaces, and trust that their government is building a healthier, more resilient future for all of us. And we have a lot of work to do.

For decades, our county has prioritized sprawl over sustainability. We have made some progress, but we're still losing vital forests and tree cover every year. Our current laws have been watered down by special interests, and therefore it's still cheaper for developers to clear-cut forest than to redevelop aging urban spaces. We must update our incentives to attract the right developers, and create more affordable housing without sacrificing our environment.

**As a county of peninsulas, we are on the front lines of climate change.** If we don't act now, flooding in our communities will only get worse. The good news is that protecting the environment in our county is more than an obligation - it's a set of opportunities. If we do things like leveraging our public buildings and brownfields for solar energy, we can save taxpayers money and create local "green-collar" jobs.

Here's my plan for protecting and preserving our environment:

### 1. Achieving a True No Net Loss of Forest Law

I was proud to be part of the team that fought for a strong No Net Loss of Forest Law in Anne Arundel County.

"No Net Loss of Forest" laws ensure that when new development occurs in our county, forest is either protected or replanted, so that we balance growth with preservation of trees and green space.

Unfortunately, one of the other candidates for County Executive often sided with special interests and the Republicans during their time on Council to water down the provisions of the law. Because the law got watered down, we're still losing forest every year in Anne Arundel County. It's better than it was, but we shouldn't settle for "not as bad as before." I'll fight to create a true No Net Loss of Forest Law, including:

- **Higher Conservation Thresholds:** Amendments to the law cut conservation requirements - the amount of forest developers have to preserve - nearly in half. We will mandate that a higher percentage of existing forest remains undisturbed on any development site.
- **Stronger Afforestation Requirements:** Increasing the percentage of trees developers must plant when building on open, non-forested land.
- **Robust Reforestation:** Raising the replanting ratio. We must acknowledge that a sapling does not provide the same ecological benefit as a mature tree; therefore, when developers remove trees, they should plant more than they cut.
- **Effective Fee-in-Lieu:** The law also allows developers to pay a fee instead of meeting conservation requirements. I'd raise those fees to a level that truly disincentivizes clearing and raises more funds to protect our green space. These funds will be strictly locked into a permanent land conservation fund to buy and protect forests elsewhere.
- **Urban Greenery:** The County needs to do its part directly, not just put pressure on developers. We will prioritize urban tree planting and stream buffer reforestation in historically underserved neighborhoods. This doesn't just improve air quality or neighborhood beautification, it's an economic justice initiative - planting trees raises property values and reduces energy costs for low-income households.

## 2. Incentivizing Redevelopment over Greenfield Sprawl

Let's make this simple: **It should not be cheaper to cut down a forest than to revitalize a parking lot.**

"Redevelopment" - turning things like dilapidated properties, shuttered businesses, or parking lots into housing - will allow us to build more homes without replacing green space. But right now it's simply easier for developers to buy green space and build there. Here's how we can fix that:

- **Land Value Tax Reform:** We will explore shifting a higher percentage of property tax onto the value of the land rather than the improvements (buildings) on it. This incentivizes owners to build "up" and denser in town centers rather than spreading "out" into sensitive environmental areas.

- **Greenfield Surcharges:** We will make it financially more expensive to develop undisturbed greenfields, naturally pushing investment toward existing structures and brownfields - and raising more revenue for conservation projects when developers *do* choose to build in open space.

### 3. Leading The Way on Renewable Energy

The county must lead by example in the transition to renewable energy. This will create jobs, save money by reducing energy costs, and benefit our county for years to come.

- **Solar-Ready Public Buildings:** Every new county building and school will be equipped with solar panels. We will also launch a comprehensive retrofit program for existing county roofs.
- **Installing Solar in Brownfields:** We will complete the current study of county brownfields and fast-track solar installations on capped landfills and other underutilized contaminated sites.
- **SolarAPP+ Implementation:** We will utilize the Maryland Energy Administration's SolarAPP+ grant to automate and fast-track the permitting process for residential rooftop solar, reducing wait times for homeowners.
- **Geothermal Exploration:** We will pilot geothermal heating and cooling systems for school system operations to drastically reduce long-term energy expenditures.
- **Require Solar in New Commercial Developments:** New commercial development should be required to install solar on roofs or in parking lots.

### 4. Climate Resiliency and Infrastructure

As sea levels rise, the flooding our communities experience will only get worse. We will stop studying the problem and start building the solutions.

- **Resiliency as a Budget Priority:** Every annual capital budget will include a dedicated percentage for sea-level rise mitigation, treating it as an essential infrastructure need rather than an "extra" expense.
- **Work With Communities to Identify Improvements:** Last year, we completed a [Flood Risk Reduction Study for the Deale-Shady Side Peninsula](#). It gave us excellent recommendations that are implementable for a reasonable cost - like raising the elevation of certain roads. We should move to quickly implement those recommendations as soon as funding allows, and replicate this data-driven approach in other communities.
- **Add a Position in the Resiliency Authority to Coordinate with Communities:** We can better coordinate resiliency projects in communities if we have a position dedicated to working with community members and leveraging the knowledge

and expertise that our residents have. We will create this position in the Resiliency Authority.

## **5. Permanent Funding for Land Conservation**

We need a sustainable way to pay for conserving our green spaces. We will work to create a permanent local funding source that will be dedicated to saving our open spaces and our forests. We must preserve as much land as we can now - while it's still able to be saved.

## **6. Increasing Public Water Access**

People protect what they love, and they love what they can experience. Getting people out on the water helps inspire them to be good stewards of the land.

- **Increase Kayak and Small Craft Launches:** These are relatively inexpensive to build; my goal is a small craft launch on every shore of every river, to get more of our neighbors on the water more easily.
- **South County Boat Ramp:** We will ensure permanent access to a public boat ramp in South County, including by purchasing the Discovery Village property in Shady Side, which has the potential to be a valuable community center or maritime industry economic hub.
- **Get More First-Timers on the Water:** I'll continue River Days, the series of summer festivals where we offer free boat rides and water activities. Every year, I meet so many residents who have never been on the water before experiencing it for the first time, and it's one of my personal favorite initiatives we've implemented in the Pittman administration. We will analyze the feasibility of the county owning and operating its own tour boats in the long term.