



Growing Our Own: A Small Business Economy for Everyone

Anne Arundel County is home to brilliant entrepreneurs, innovative creators, and hardworking small business owners.

But for too long, our economic development strategy has focused on chasing big, out-of-state corporations while letting our local talent get tangled in red tape.

We don't need to hunt for success elsewhere. We need to grow it right here.

Here's my plan to revolutionize how Anne Arundel County supports small businesses and entrepreneurs in my first term as County Executive.

First, I want to share the values that guide my approach.

- **"Economic Gardening" over Economic Hunting.** Decades of data show that local businesses—not big box chains—are the true engines of job creation. Instead of offering massive tax breaks to lure corporate headquarters from other states, we will focus our resources on "gardening"—growing the businesses that are already here.
- **Government should be a partner, not a barrier.** Starting a business is hard enough without the government making it harder. A permit application shouldn't be a test of endurance. Our job is to clear the path so you can get to work, keeping permitting processes simple, fast, and fair, while maintaining essential standards to protect consumers, employees, and the environment.
- **Access to opportunity must be inclusive.** Whether you speak English or Spanish, whether you have a PhD or a GED, you deserve the same high-quality service from your county government when you come to us to start a business.

Specific solutions to unlock the potential of our local economy:

1. Radical Reform of the Permitting Process

Small business owners—from restaurant owners to childcare providers—consistently tell me that the county’s permitting process is their biggest headache. One of my top priorities as County Executive will be working with department directors to create systems that make it easier and cheaper for local entrepreneurs to get the permits they need and launch the businesses they’ve dreamed of.

- **Break Down the Silos:** Currently, a permit application gets passed from one department to another in a linear "assembly line," where one delay stalls the entire project. We will move to a **Project-Based Review** system. We will create cross-functional teams where reviewers from health, fire, and inspections work *collaboratively* on a project, rather than in isolation.
- **The "Save Your Place" Guarantee:** It is unacceptable that the current system forces you to restart an application from scratch if you are denied or make an error, especially because many permits are denied due to small issues or technical errors. We will overhaul the digital portal to ensure that applicants can save their progress, correct errors, and resubmit without losing their work or their fees.
- **Collective Accountability:** I will set collective Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for our permitting departments. If a permit is stuck in "regulatory purgatory," it reflects on the whole team. We will recognize and reward county employees who find creative, safe ways to say "yes" and get doors open faster.

2. Protect and Expand Support for Small Business

Small businesses that serve our community’s critical need more partnership from our government, not a longer maze to run through.

- **Protect and Expand Capital Access:** We will protect and expand the **Inclusive Ventures Program (IVP)** and the **VOLT Fund**. These programs provide critical startup capital and mentorship to minority, woman, and veteran-owned businesses. We will specifically target food entrepreneurs to build on the success of our local agriculture and food systems work.
- **Navigating the Maze:** We will create a Small Business Concierge Team of county staff dedicated to helping entrepreneurs navigate state and county regulations, similar to the internal task forces we plan to create to help affordable housing developers navigate the permitting process. This isn’t about adding new positions, but clarifying the roles and expectations of existing staff.
- **One-Stop Shop:** We will consolidate information for grants, permits, and tax incentives into a single, user-friendly portal. You shouldn’t need to hire a consultant just to find out what help is available to you.

3. Universal Language Access for Small Business Services

A language barrier should not be a barrier to business. For our Spanish-speaking entrepreneurs, navigating complex codes and inspections can be impossible without support.

- **Tech-Enabled Translation:** We will equip all frontline county staff—including health and building inspectors—with handheld, AI-powered translation devices. This technology enables real-time, high-quality communication in the field, ensuring that an inspector can explain a regulation clearly and a business owner can ask questions in their native language.
- **Accessible Permitting:** We will use AI translation tools to ensure that our permitting applications and guidance documents are available in Spanish and other key languages, lowering the barrier to entry for immigrant entrepreneurs who want to build our local economy.

Investing in our local entrepreneurs is investing in our future. If we do these things, we will build an economy that is resilient, diverse, and rooted right here in Anne Arundel County.