

*Who's
Running?*

2026 HOWARD COUNTY CANDIDATE GUIDE



DEMOCRAT **DEB JUNG**
HOWARD COUNTY EXECUTIVE

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

What is your vision for strengthening Howard County's competitiveness for business investment, job creation, and private sector growth?

As County Executive, I would strengthen Howard County's competitiveness by supporting the Innovation District described in the Gateway Master Plan. I voted in favor of the plan and sponsored amendments that would preserve and promote current and future economic uses. Howard County is strategically placed to capitalize on its geographical location, as well as its highly educated workforce. Gateway's Innovation District needs a capable leader to cultivate the academic and research partnerships that will make the plan a reality.

I will continue to support the phenomenal work of the Howard County Economic Development Authority and TEDCO to promote business development and investment. Of Howard County's 10,000 businesses, 80% are small businesses that need continued fostering, mentoring, and promoting. A majority of these small businesses are restaurants, which need regulatory flexibility, access to reliable workforce, and promotional support. As a Councilmember, I consistently worked with our local restaurants to determine the impact of proposed legislation and identified ways to reduce or eliminate adverse outcomes for them. My efforts to prevent the passage of the bill requiring specific menu items deemed healthy shielded local restaurants from having to keep unnecessary and expensive inventory.

I am fully committed to funding our public schools and community college, which contribute to our regional competitiveness and grow high-achieving job seekers and entrepreneurs. As County Executive, I would explore ways to expand the County's workforce development center as a reliable resource for current job seekers and employers and continue to identify the jobs of the future.

I supported recent zoning changes that would allow new commercial activities on agricultural lands as an economic support to farming. These changes were spurred by an interest to make Howard County competitive with neighboring jurisdictions.

I would also support comprehensive rezoning as a tool for fostering new private-sector growth and unleashing economic potential for parcels with outdated zoning and building mixed-use areas that attract top-notch talent.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

How will you measure progress on your goals?

Indicators such as new businesses relocating to Howard County from outside the County, preferably from outside of the State, would be one of my primary metrics of success. Hard data, such as leasing statistics and new commercial square footage, indicates overall success and is meaningful to the credit rating agencies.

I would also use the Chamber and its individual members as a resource for gauging success. Through my tenure as a Councilmember, I have always been open to conversations with the Chamber as an organization and with individual members as independent business owners. I will continue to receive and respond to requests to develop and promote the economic success of our County.

What steps will you take to reduce regulatory barriers and create a more predictable, pro-business environment?

Restaurants and development are two of our most regulated businesses. I have championed restaurants in my time on the Council and hope to simplify zoning concerns in the future.

I plan to pursue comprehensive rezoning, which should eliminate the costly and unpredictable process of changing regulations via legislation or piecemeal rezoning. Modernization of our regulatory systems will also reduce wait times, contradictory information, and other impediments to new commercial construction and permit approvals.

Restaurants make up a significant portion of Howard County's small businesses. I understand that the regulatory environment is significant for this industry, yet it is essential to the public for the purpose of protecting food safety.

However, in 2023, legislation was introduced to force restaurants to carry and prepare a specific menu for children if a children's meal was offered for sale. This bill had no impact on food safety but rather involved six pages of very specific regulations about the types and sizes of foods and drinks that restaurants must provide and be prepared to supply. A number of restaurants testified they could not adhere to the regulations as introduced and would likely discontinue children's meals rather than attempt to comply with a set of onerous new rules. I successfully voted to keep the bill from being enacted.

In the spring of 2025, the Health Department approached the Council prior to our budget work sessions to review a list of fees it was planning to raise, including a number of fees that restaurants pay regularly. I explained the difficulties that restaurants have meeting ends and their small margins of operation. Ultimately, the fee increases were never introduced.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

How do you plan to align economic development with workforce readiness, ensuring residents are prepared for emerging jobs (especially in tech, healthcare, and trades)?

Supporting educational efforts in emerging jobs is the primary way to develop a capable workforce. I voted in support of Howard Community College's new workforce development building, which will provide a local option for developing and tailoring hands-on training for in-demand jobs.

As previously stated, I would explore ways to expand the County's workforce development center as a reliable resource for current job seekers and employers and continue to identify the jobs of the future.

What role do you see for public-private partnerships in advancing innovation, entrepreneurship, and inclusive economic growth?

Gateway's Innovation District will provide the master class in public-private partnerships. Howard County is fortunate to have a sophisticated Economic Development Authority and TEDCO to assist in recruiting business partners and launching our innovation district. Inclusive economic growth should occur at all levels of the economic scale, from start-up technology companies to brick-and-mortar businesses.

How will you ensure that small and minority-owned businesses have equitable access to County contracts, incentives, and support services?

I successfully lobbied the current County Executive to pursue a disparity study regarding the awarding of contracts to minority, disability, and women-owned enterprises. I look forward to getting the results of the study so I can identify the County's gaps in this area of business contracting with the County.

To improve equitable access, I would reach out to the County's Equal Business Opportunity Commission for ideas about the best organizations to advertise County contract opportunities as well as develop a list of contacts for wider distribution to small and minority businesses. There are numerous affiliate groups that focus on providing networking and advertisement of business opportunities for minority, disability, and women-owned enterprises who could partner with the County to ensure that contracting opportunities reach those targeted groups.

BUDGETING

What do you see as the biggest challenge for the County budget, and how do you plan to address it?

As a two-term Councilmember, I earned a reputation for fiscal prudence during budget considerations. I dug deep into new Capital projects that had little benefit to the County as a whole and I scrutinized sole source contracts and spending that did not align with best practices. I took my fiduciary responsibility to the taxpayers seriously no matter the social and political pressures on me.

Our biggest budgetary challenge is recent spending on non-essential Capital projects in lieu of repairing, replacing, and maintaining aging infrastructure. New HVACs and water mains aren't as photogenic as shiny new buildings but our County infrastructure needs significant investments now to avoid costly repairs later.

I am very familiar with the priority decisions that a County Executive makes when creating the annual budget. Financially the County has been doing well: we have low unemployment, moderate revenue growth, and new sources of income thanks to broader market conditions. Investing these dollars in projects and programs that continue to promote our County's success is the key strategy for future years.

What steps will you take to increase transparency, trust, and civic engagement in budget and policy decisions?

I have proven through my years as a Councilmember that I am an honest broker. I do my homework, share my work, and am accessible to questions and concerns. My County Executive Administration would operate under the same principles. I am a publicly financed candidate, which promotes civic trust in elected leadership. I would deal openly and meet regularly with the public and with stakeholders. I would enable the Council to access important information for transparency and legislative decision making. I was key in creating an independent Office of Inspector General, which investigates waste, fraud, and abuse in County government and related agencies. The Inspector General's findings will help guide which reforms are needed to ensure accountability.

I also plan to hold Town Halls on the issues of great importance to Howard County residents. For example, the administration is set to introduce a bill that will have significant impacts on zoning in Howard County, allowing for Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) both attached and detached, as of right, subject to some minor guidelines regarding setbacks and parking. The bill will also allow for replacement of single-family homes with two family homes throughout Howard County. Major legislation like this should be brought before the residents through a public process prior to introduction in order to obtain feedback and solicit the best possible ideas for creating such impactful legislation.

DEVELOPMENT & REGULATORY ENVIRONMENT

Do you share the concern that our road and transit infrastructure is inadequate to support current and future growth?

Our road and transit infrastructure is not adequate to support current and future growth and I have consistently worked to coordinate the two through HoCo by Design, the most recent General Plan. The County is limited in its ability to expand existing road and transit systems but I would pursue all State and Federal partnerships to improve Howard County's connectivity.

What are your top three priorities for transportation, infrastructure, and public facilities investment?

- Maintain, renovate and expand overcrowded and aging public school buildings
- Pursue funding partnerships to increase emergency room capacity at the hospital
- Adopt flexible and reliable public transportation options, including micro-transit and the Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) system that will connect Howard County to Montgomery County and the Silver Spring Metro station
- Reduce traffic congestion and increase traffic safety through State partnerships and efficient road maintenance

How will you work with regional, state, and federal partners to secure needed resources?

I have been actively engaged with elected officials at the State and the Federal levels for nearly a decade as a Councilmember and enjoy professional friendships with elected officials in other Counties through my service as a Council delegate to the Maryland Association of Counties.

The Howard County State Delegation has been very successful in bringing much-needed funding to County projects, including the efforts to address flooding in Ellicott City. I will continue to work with our Delegates and Senators to pursue funding for these types of initiatives.

I will continue to be an active member and partner in the Maryland Association of Counties. I look forward to working with decision makers throughout the State on ways to collaborate, achieve efficiencies, and maximize resources.

Maryland's Congressional representatives have always reached out to local jurisdictions to inform them of funding opportunities. I will continue to vigorously pursue those possibilities for Howard County with our federal delegation.

DEVELOPMENT & REGULATORY ENVIRONMENT

The rewrite of zoning and land-use regulations will shape Howard County for decades. What are your top three priorities in this process, and what is your overall zoning and land use philosophy? What outcomes do you expect to see from this effort?

My top three priorities for the zoning and regulation rewrite would be

- to include all voices,
- simplify and modernize the zoning regulations based on recommendations created in 2017-2018 by a well-respected consultant, and
- preserve commercial zoning districts while reducing conflicts with residential zones.

I have lived in Columbia for three decades and appreciate the respect that was given to the natural environment through broad setbacks, serpentine roads, and preserved open space. The built environment can live in harmony with the natural environment if we are deliberate about the final product. Equally important, environmental concerns about the uses of properties cannot be ignored when those uses are incompatible with residences.

Because the County is mostly built-out, redevelopment will give us the opportunity to re-engineer existing asphalt and concrete expanses into livable spaces. I supported the density vision in the General Plan but I successfully lobbied for homeownership opportunities so that our County remains a place where people can put down roots for decades.

I am optimistic about the initial proposal to require two types of housing in Activity Centers. This is just a first step though and future redevelopment efforts should transform utilitarian shopping centers into multi-use spaces, including opportunities for first time home buyers to purchase a residence in Howard County.

What are your plans to encourage redevelopment of existing commercial properties?

During the consideration of the General Plan, I repeatedly asked if the private sector was invested in redevelopment scenarios that were being presented to the Councilmembers by the consulting group. I was not convinced that the proposed scenarios were implementable since some shopping centers currently have residential allowances that have not been pursued. Any redevelopment of this intensity should begin by working with the property owners and investors to reduce neighbor concerns and income disruptions as a result of displacing tenants during construction. The County can help facilitate this process.

DEVELOPMENT & REGULATORY ENVIRONMENT

Development is often framed as a conflict between housing growth and school capacity. How do you believe the County should balance school funding needs with new housing development?

Prioritizing school construction over other non-essential projects could address this conflict. HCPSS predicts stable enrollment for the near term and this gives the County an opportunity to catch up on deferred expansion projects. If we can achieve our construction and renovation goals, APFO will become much less of a concern for future development.

EDUCATION

How will you support stronger school-to-career pathways that connect students with local employers and internship opportunities?

As County Executive, I would avoid funding cuts to existing educational programs at HCPSS. The past two budgets have cut hundreds of positions, increased teachers' workloads, and eliminated elementary music and educational enrichment programs. Investments in young children's academic success and curiosity results in future professional success.

For more direct investments, I would strengthen funding and coordination among County employers, HCPSS, and HCC. I would help create an internship/employer bank that could be published on various websites in the County, including the Chamber of Commerce, the Economic Development Authority and the County's own website.