

*Who's
Running?*

2026 HOWARD COUNTY CANDIDATE GUIDE



DISTRICT 1
DEMOCRAT **KEVIN CHIN**
HOWARD COUNTY COUNCIL

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

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

We have had anemic economic growth in Maryland. Governor Moore highlighted that our state GDP has been below the national average for the past 10 years. This has led to budget cuts and tax increases in last year's General Assembly with more coming our way this session. Howard County has been and should continue to be the leader in economic growth in the state, but the general stagnation of the economy has hurt both the state's and the county's finances. I recently spoke with a partner in commercial real estate who said that our Class A offices have low vacancy rates of about 10%, which is healthy, but our Class B and Class C commercial properties have close to 50% vacancy. We need to repurpose this land for other uses and revitalize these areas to promote more businesses coming into the area. A frequent issue many businesses have are the lack of housing for workers to live in nearby. This has led to longer commutes, congesting our roads and making it harder for small businesses to start up without the workforce nearby.

How will you measure progress on your goals?

The County is required to have a balanced budget and it's a matter of money in (county revenue) minus money out (county expenditures). I believe in a politics of abundance. A growing, prosperous economy means robust revenue, which is primarily income tax and property tax.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

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

One of the most common complaints from business owners as well as regular citizens is the capriciousness of local and state government. We need to have a set of laws and regulations that are consistent and predictable. Businesses are okay with paying taxes, they can do the math to make it work (or not), but what they can't calculate is uncertainty. Residents are also frustrated when they see some businesses go through loopholes or get certain exceptions not given to others. I've spoken to multiple businesses in Old Ellicott City including the owner of Park Ridge Trading Company. She talked about how the Historic Preservation Committee wouldn't allow her wooden door to be replaced with metal even though she has had to replace the door multiple times due to flooding. On the other hand some businesses have ignored the Committee's recommendations without punishment. There needs to be consistent, predictable, and reasonable regulations that find the balance between being supportive of business and other interests.

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

Howard County Public School System is the crown jewel of the county. It is incredibly important to invest in our young people for the betterment of the students' lives and also the betterment of society. Howard Community College is also an economic driver of the county. I fully support HCC and its programs that teach our young people actionable skills that immediately prepare them for the workforce of the future.

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

I'm supportive of public-private partnerships. I was present at a meeting with Maryland Builders Industry Association where representatives of Howard Community College were creating a partnership between both groups. This is something I'm extremely supportive of connecting students directly with local businesses. The Howard County Economic Development Association can also be an engine for growth with their loans and support of small businesses.

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

The first step is making sure we're accurately collecting data on small and minority owned businesses. The Howard County Economic Development Association keeps data tracking small and minority businesses. Currently, 50% of HCEDA's catalyst funds go to small, minority, or women owned businesses. I fully support creating a more equitable and inclusive business environment.

BUDGETING

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

The biggest challenge is the rising cost of services that the county provides. The answer is to catalyze economic growth in the county by expanding our tax base. While not as dependent on the federal government as Montgomery or Prince George's County, we still have over 10% of workers employed by the federal government. We need to create self sufficiency in our local economy to promote resilience and ensure that we can thrive in spite of the capriciousness of what happens in Washington.

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

I will make sure if elected that my constituents will be informed about the policy decisions the county council makes. Civic engagement is important but too often it's only those who have the means in time and money to engage in policy decisions. In the creation of the master plan HoCoByDesign there was significant community outreach, which I applaud.

DEVELOPMENT & REGULATORY ENVIRONMENT

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

Adequate infrastructure is essential to support business growth and development, and that's why we need to increase our funding for our roads and transit. With planned increased growth in Columbia, there needs to be improvements in buses and other public transit. There also needs to be improvement in walkability to our local businesses so that they are not as dependent on cars.

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

My top three priorities are: increasing funding in education to promote a strong workforce, increasing bus service on the most used transit lines as well as extending BRT from Montgomery County up Rt 29 into Howard County, and improving pedestrian and bike access to local businesses.

DEVELOPMENT & REGULATORY ENVIRONMENT

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

I would prioritize county dollars on projects that release matching state or federal dollars.

I currently have cordial working relationships with nearly all members of the state delegation, county council, board of education, and many members of the Maryland General Assembly. I am endorsed by Del. Chao Wu, a former Board of Education member, Sen. Clarence Lam, and Register of Wills Byron MacFarlane.

In the ER, I'm used to dealing with uncomfortable conversations with upset patients or family members who've been in the waiting room for hours or consults with specialists at 2am asking them to come in to take care of a patient. I am the type of leader who can have conversations with all types of people of all different backgrounds. I'm a firm believer in the ability to reach compromise face to face. Particularly in one on one conversations, it's hard to hate up close. We all have different values, and politics is how we express those values. Ensuring Howard County has the necessary resources to support local businesses is extremely important to me.

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?

I support HoCoByDesign, the general plan that gathered thousands of hours and months of committees, testimony from Howard Countians. As the Spending Affordability Advisory Committee said in their report, if we implement what we all as a county decided along with a 5-0 vote by the county council at the time, we can ensure strong economic growth. I want to promote growth in designated areas outlined in the general plan, called Activity Centers. This includes areas along US 40 as well as aging village centers with empty storefronts. Many areas in Howard County, particularly Columbia are in desperate need of revitalization.

I expect to see greater growth in Activity Centers and Downtown Columbia. This will drive investment and increase our tax base. Over 90% of our taxes come from income tax and property tax. When we grow as a county, we have more revenue to support the vital services such as schools, roads, public transit, parks, library, and public safety that make our community so desirable.

DEVELOPMENT & REGULATORY ENVIRONMENT

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

We have onerous regulations on what businesses can and cannot do with their properties. One example is the capricious and arbitrary parking mandates that are not based on any data. Businesses and the banks that are lending them money know how much parking they do or do not need. The county's mandates restrict needed flexibility of businesses and worsens our local and global environment with increased impervious surfaces. As I mentioned previously, our Class B and Class C commercial real estate has quite high vacancy rates. Some of the land could be redeveloped into Class A commercial, but some will need the flexibility to be switched to mixed use property. There is considerable residential demand in Howard County, which will help grow our tax base as well as support the local businesses powering our economy.

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?

I think it's a false dichotomy to pit housing and schools against one another. The well being of our schools is dependent on housing and vice versa. Over half of our teachers live outside of the county due to the high cost of housing in the area. When we build housing, we are building housing for our first responders, our police, and importantly our educators who make our school system the envy of the world. There are significant funding shortfalls in our school system. A growing economy and a growing tax base will fix that funding gap.'

Maryland is ranked 43rd in the nation in housing affordability. Comptroller Brooke Lierman in her ["State of the Economy Report"](#) said building housing is essential for our economic growth and affordability.

When I was at a rally in support of closing the budget gap for the schools in May of this year, I spoke to an arts teacher at Wilde Lake HS. She said how she was spending half of her income on an apartment in downtown Columbia because she wanted to live where she worked, and she desired the walkability. She loved teaching our county's children and had no plan for kids of her own. A person like her is an enormous asset to our county both culturally in her contribution to the arts program at WLHS but yes financially as well.

About 90% of our county's revenue comes from property tax and income tax, and the biggest expenditure in the county budget is on educating students. We know from the ["Pupil Yield Analysis"](#) done by the county that apartments generate significantly less students (.305) than Single Family Homes (.539). If you parse out the data more, you'll find that high rise apartments produce even less (.175 students/unit). That number is even lower if you look at buildings such as The Metropolitan (.010 students/unit) which is predominantly studio and 1BR apartments (62%).

Healthy economic growth and increased attainable housing go hand in hand as long as we are smart about the type of housing that we are building and where we are building it.

EDUCATION

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

Strong school-to-career pathways are important in growing our economy, especially at the local level. I believe the county can facilitate these pathways by supporting workforce training programs, apprenticeships programs, and advancing innovative trade and technical programs. For example, the county can fund additional workforce training programs in collaboration with HCC and HCPSS. Howard County Government can also be a leader in sponsoring apprenticeship programs with our Department of Recreation and Parks and the Department of Public Works. Trade and technical programs are critical for those students who may be seeking an alternative to college. I would also support efforts by the county government to partner with the state's new Department of Service and Civic Innovation to create Service Year Options and Maryland Corps opportunities with local businesses and organizations.