

Who's
Running?

2026 HOWARD COUNTY CANDIDATE GUIDE



DEMOCRAT

DISTRICT 4

SHAMIEKA PRESTON
HOWARD COUNTY COUNCIL

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

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

My vision for a stronger Howard County is an economy that supports a broad business ecosystem, from startups and small businesses, which make up roughly 80 percent of businesses in the County, to established corporations and regional employers.

Howard County is a diverse, family-centered community where people value education, creativity, and connection. We are known for strong schools, vibrant arts and music, access to nature, and a deep respect for local history and culture. Our neighbors show up for one another, celebrate many cultures, and stay actively engaged in shaping a safe, welcoming, and forward-looking community. Economic growth should reflect and reinforce those values. I believe we should prioritize businesses and industries that strengthen our culture.

I envision a Howard County where businesses can plan with confidence, access local talent, and grow responsibly. That means supporting entrepreneurship and new business categories, encouraging redevelopment of existing commercial areas, and working with large employers headquartered or operating here to hire more Howard County residents.

At the same time, Howard County must remain a safety-first county. Innovation and economic growth should not come at the expense of resident health, public safety, or quality of life. I support a thoughtful approach to emerging industries and new technologies, including designated innovation corridors where impacts can be closely reviewed, measured, and evaluated before expansion countywide.

Strong economies depend on clear rules and fair enforcement. When government applies policies consistently and in the open, businesses can invest with confidence and residents can trust that growth is being managed responsibly.

I believe the business community and residents are both essential stakeholders in Howard County's future. By working together, we can build an economy that is innovative, competitive, and grounded in the well-being of the people who live and work here.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

How will you measure progress on your goals?

Progress should be measured using clear, public, outcome-focused metrics, including:

- Growth and retention of small businesses
- Local job creation and growth in median wages
- Share of Howard County jobs held by Howard County residents
- Permitting and approval timelines and adherence to published standards
- Commercial occupancy and redevelopment outcomes
- Creation of and participation in internships, apprenticeships, and workforce programs tied to local employers

Publishing these measures builds transparency and trust while allowing continuous improvement.

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

A pro-business environment is one where the rules are clear, the process is understandable, and decisions are made consistently and on time. I support simplifying processes, improving coordination across agencies, and using plain language guidance so businesses and residents know what is required upfront.

Predictability also requires accountability. Developers should be held to approved plans and conditions, and regulations should be applied consistently. Streamlining should never compromise public safety, health, or community standards.

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

Workforce readiness must begin/continue with the employers and educational institutions already here. Corporations and small businesses can work with schools to engage students at multiple levels, including career exploration, paid internships, apprenticeships, and entry-level positions.

I support strong partnerships among employers, schools, Howard Community College, unions, and workforce providers to prepare residents for careers in tech, health care, and the trades. These pathways help Howard County residents access local jobs and help employers build a reliable, local talent pipeline.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

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

Public-private partnerships are most effective when roles, expectations, and outcomes are clearly defined. The County should serve as a convener, bringing together employers, educators, investors, and nonprofits to pilot programs, share risk, and scale successful models.

Partnerships are especially valuable for entrepreneurship, workforce development, redevelopment, and emerging industries that want to grow responsibly while strengthening the community.

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

Equitable access requires transparency and follow-through. I support simplifying procurement processes, expanding outreach and technical assistance, and improving bid readiness so small and minority-owned businesses can compete effectively.

The County should also track participation and outcomes and regularly review programs to ensure they are delivering meaningful results.

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 balancing growing demands, including schools, infrastructure, and public safety, with long-term fiscal sustainability. I support disciplined budgeting, multi-year planning, and clear performance measures to ensure public dollars are used effectively.

Smart economic development, particularly redevelopment and local job creation, helps grow the tax base without overburdening residents or businesses.

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

Nothing is more powerful than a transparent government. Decision making in closed meetings or in boardrooms is not a trust building exercise. Trust is built through transparency and participation. I support clearer budget documents, earlier public engagement, and ongoing communication so residents and business owners understand decisions, timelines, and tradeoffs.

DEVELOPMENT & REGULATORY ENVIRONMENT

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

Infrastructure must keep pace with growth.

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

Top priorities include safer streets, improved transit connectivity between HoCo communities, schools, job centers, and public facilities that support workforce development and community needs. We need to prioritize renovating Howard County schools especially those that have been on the capital projects list for decades.

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

I will work with regional, state, and federal partners to secure funding and deliver priority projects.

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 priorities are predictability, redevelopment of existing commercial areas, and compatibility with surrounding communities. Zoning should provide clear standards so developers know the rules, residents understand what to expect, and the County can enforce approvals consistently.

Clearer zoning should result in faster approvals for compliant projects, stronger redevelopment outcomes, and growth that aligns with infrastructure and school capacity.

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

I support redevelopment of underutilized commercial properties through streamlined approvals, updated standards where appropriate, and incentives tied to public benefits such as local hiring, small business opportunities, and infrastructure improvements. Accountability is key: redevelopment should meet approved conditions and deliver promised outcomes.

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?

Development, schools, and economic vitality are deeply connected. By planning and investing in school expansion, inter-county transit, and infrastructure alongside growth, we can continue to develop in a way that supports both businesses and families.

As a member of the PTACHC community, I support APFO standards for schools. I believe that by fully funding our schools, we can reach the goals of all of our county stakeholders. We will continue to be a growing county with well-educated, well-paid residents. In order to meet their needs, we must build and preserve housing that middle-income families, people born and raised in Howard County, and our public sector professionals want and can afford. We need to build homes for people who work locally can also live in the community they serve.

When residents can live near where they work, businesses benefit from a stable workforce, families benefit from stronger schools and shorter commutes, and the County becomes more competitive overall.

EDUCATION

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

I support expanding school-to-career pathways that connect students with local employers through paid internships, apprenticeships, and entry-level opportunities. Corporations and small businesses can partner with schools to offer meaningful experiences that reflect real workforce needs.

These partnerships help students build skills and see clear pathways to local careers while helping employers develop and retain talent rooted in the community.