

Who's  
Running?

# 2026 HOWARD COUNTY CANDIDATE GUIDE



DEMOCRAT

DISTRICT 5  
**RYAN O'CONNOR**  
HOWARD COUNTY COUNCIL

## ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

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

Create a narrative that Howard County is open for business and is the prime location in the Baltimore/Washington region. Support that narrative through public partnership opportunities, a business-friendly regulatory environment, an educated/trained workforce and a supportive network of organizations and experts to help businesses grow and prosper.

**How will you measure progress on your goals?**

Job growth, increase in commercial tax base, feedback from stakeholders, performance compared to other counties.

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

Get input from the Chamber, EDA, trade groups and business owners on what changes will be impactful. Pursue those improvements through policy changes collaborating with the County Executive and/or code changes through legislation.

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

Support adequate funding to the Office of Workforce Development, community college and school system, including internship and mentoring programs. Ensure EDA and the Chamber have what they need to show businesses considering Howard Co that we have the educated and trained pool of employees.

## ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

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

Tax incentives, loan guarantees and grants for high value employers, facilitating property procurement, improve permitting and licensing processes, expand opportunity zones and innovation districts, consolidate small parcels to accommodate light industrial/distribution development, ensure funding for the incubator/innovation center, stand against policies and legislation that increase costs to develop or operate a business

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

Train them on RFP systems and processes including mentors with experience bidding county work, provide assistance with grant and proposal writing, hold accessible pre-bid meetings, connect small businesses together for larger contracts, expand use of prime/sub contracting model at the county level,

## BUDGETING

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

A maturing county with flattening growth, pressure on school funding from state mandates, rapid growth in senior population and aging infrastructure. Revenue can be addressed through growth in the commercial tax base, encouraging redevelopment on underdeveloped land and continued strong school system to attract high income tax payors. Expenses must prioritize long term infrastructure needs, reserves for future replacement and investments in economic growth over pet projects and waste.

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

Regarding transparency, there are already many ways anyone who wants to be engaged can watch the evolution of things the County Council does as meetings are public, streamed, on TV and posted to the website. I will maintain consistent communication with the public via emails, newsletters, social media and town halls to encourage engagement. As people tend to distrust things they don't understand, some level of trust should also stem from engagement. At a micro level, I hope the new Inspector General will also increase transparency and trust as the public sees a constant effort to root out fraud and waste.

## DEVELOPMENT & REGULATORY ENVIRONMENT

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

Yes.

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

Current District 5 priorities including I-70 widening, Marriottsville Rd expansion and Route 99 safety improvements. County-wide priorities include adequate funding to maintain our aging water and sewer systems; capacity improvements on Route 29 and 100; connecting our public transportation with regional systems so it's more effective getting workers in and out of Howard Co.

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

Work with Administration to keep District 5 projects high in the priority Letter; support efforts performed by the Administration and specific agencies to secure state and federal funding/grants.

**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?**

If the question refers to Comprehensive Zoning, my focus is enacting the General Plan, including directing development where infrastructure exists, encouraging redevelopment, prioritizing commercial growth and home ownership opportunities. If the question refers to the code re-write project that began 10 years ago, my focus would be: cleaning up the inconsistencies that have evolved over time; consolidating and simplifying the process regulations; creating more certainty for investors from the start to lower risk.

Developers and businesses choosing to invest in Howard Co versus other counties where it's easier to get projects completed.

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

Improve permitting and licensing processes, expand opportunity zones and innovation districts, allow more lot coverage by eliminating things like excessive parking and sidewalks to nowhere, consolidate small parcels to accommodate light industrial/distribution development, tax incentives.

## 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?**

Re-frame the narrative. Educate the public that school enrollment is declining in the county and state and the type of housing growth imagined in the General Plan will not generate students at the rate Howard Co experienced over the past decades. Growth will be needed to fund the operating and capital needs of our schools even with flat enrollment.

## EDUCATION

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

Support the efforts and funding Office of Workforce Development, EDA, community college and school system that run these programs.