



2026 Candidate Questionnaire

Candidate Name: Nick Stewart

Position: County Executive

What urban planning model examples do you admire and would seek to adapt in Baltimore County? If your vision includes increasing the offer of “third places” (public gathering spaces), please include the actions you would take.

"Baltimore County faces a housing and economic development crisis created by our failed planning systems. Many of our older commercial corridors and malls were built for a different era. Today, places like Security Square, Liberty Road, Eastern Boulevard, Eastpoint Mall and portions of White Marsh are struggling with declining retail, excess parking and fragmented land use. Many corridors like Liberty Road have aging facades and too many underperforming properties such as storage facilities or dilapidated buildings instead of place-making economic assets, active main streets, community gathering spaces and, most critically, affordable housing. These areas already have infrastructure and access to major roads, yet without a modern planning framework, they risk becoming long-term underperforming corridors instead of thriving community centers.

First of all, Baltimore County does not following modern best practices with planning. We create a Master plan every decade but because of councilmanic courtesy and a sprawling planning and land use bureaucracy, we do not follow the plan. Moreover, those plans are not created with communities in mind. Every community should be collaborating with a centralized County Planning Office to create small area plans that are incorporated into the master plan and then we have to hold to that plan.

Modern planning models matter because they replace fragmented, single-use zoning with coordinated, mixed-use communities that can revitalize struggling corridors and turn aging retail areas into vibrant neighborhood centers.

My One County Initiative

(<https://nickforbaltimorecounty.com/issue/housing-framework/>) (<https://nickforbaltimorecounty.com/issue/housing-framework/>) calls for a number of legal reforms that will end councilmanic courtesy and implement a community-centered planning framework.

Once we have a functional system in place, the planning approach I most admire in addressing the crises of our County is New Urbanism. At its core, New Urbanism focuses on mixed-use development, human-scaled design and communities where housing, retail, jobs and public



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space exist together in walkable environments connected to transit. It prioritizes pedestrian pathways, integrated green space and architecture that reflects local culture and history rather than generic suburban sprawl.

These principles are particularly powerful when applied to aging commercial corridors and malls, where large parking lots and underutilized retail space can be redeveloped into walkable mixed-use town centers that support housing, small businesses and community gathering spaces.

We have already seen what this model can achieve locally. Greenleigh at Crossroads demonstrates what is possible when a New Urbanist community is built in the right place. A successful model requires a true center with viable retail and offices, integrated green space and strong connectivity to transit and surrounding communities. The opportunity becomes even larger when you look at the broader Essex area. The abandoned LaFarge gravel site, the MARC station, former industrial sites along the waterfront and nearby economic anchors such as MedStar Franklin Square, Tradepoint Atlantic and CCBC create the conditions for a broader regional vision, such as the work outlined in Essex Reimagined. With the right planning framework, places like “The Boulevard” and the waterfront could evolve into vibrant mixed-use districts rather than disconnected commercial strips. The fact is that Essex is just one example of communities across the County that are primed for this approach, as you can read about in my One County Vision

(<https://nickforbaltimorecounty.com/one-county-initiative/>)(<https://nickforbaltimorecounty.com/one-county-initiative/>)).

Transit must play a central role in this strategy. True transit-oriented development means building communities that actually orient around transit access. The oft-cited example of this in the County is Owings Mills but the area is really transit-adjacent development. The Metro station exists, but the surrounding land use still prioritizes parking and separation rather than a fully integrated walkable district. Future redevelopment should focus on compact mixed-use communities where transit, housing and jobs function together.

Another major challenge is access to public gathering spaces. Studies

(<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC5663018/>)(<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC5663018/>)) have proven that access to open space is strongly connected to physical and mental



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health, yet roughly 65 percent of residents inside the URDL lack walking access to open space. That gap affects both the quality of life and our ability to attract and retain residents.

Some solutions are within reach today, while others require longer-term planning reforms.

Some solutions are within reach. We should pursue a Green Infrastructure Network, similar to Howard County's model, to connect pocket parks, trails and small green spaces into a cohesive system. Linking these assets can dramatically expand access to open space while also strengthening environmental resilience and advancing green revitalization across the County. We should also invest in multi-use civic facilities such as the Pikesville Armory that combine recreation, culture and community programming. Unfortunately, the Council created a bespoke zoning classification for that project that cannot easily be applied elsewhere. That means similar multi-use civic facilities cannot be replicated across Baltimore County without additional legislation, limiting our ability to expand these types of community gathering spaces.

Finally, redevelopment itself must create third places. As we transform aging commercial corridors, new mixed-use districts should include plazas, green space, pedestrian-friendly streets and spaces designed for markets, performances and community events. These places are not decorative amenities. They are the civic infrastructure that allows communities to gather, interact and build stronger local economies.

If we combine structural reforms with New Urbanist planning principles, true transit-oriented development and a connected network of public spaces, Baltimore County can transform declining corridors into vibrant mixed-use communities while preserving the character of the neighborhoods residents already love."

What concrete steps will you take to address the acute shortage of affordable housing in Baltimore County and what other measures would you take to encourage population retention and increase?

"Housing is a defining issue of my campaign — because it is a defining issue for our County. So, let me say at the outset, you can review all of our housing plans on our website (<https://nickforbaltimorecounty.com/issue/addressing-housing-crisis/>)(<https://nickforbaltimorecounty.com/issue/addressing-housing-crisis/>). Please note that I have authored multiple op-eds on



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the subject as well. Please see:

<https://www.baltimoresun.com/author/nick-stewart/>.

We are in an affordability crisis as a County. Two thirds of us are choosing between groceries and other essentials. It has never been harder to buy a home in our County, based on income. Incomes have fallen in Baltimore County for 5 years in a row — and we are losing jobs. And, as noted above, the majority of our students in BCPS are living in poverty. Taken together, this has caused the first population loss in the last 100 years in Baltimore County.

The primary driver of unaffordability is housing. More than a third of us are “cost burdened,” meaning we spend too much of our income on mortgages or rent. Indeed, more than half of all renters, specifically, are cost burdened. We are in crisis.

And yet, housing that is affordable is a central factor in so many areas of life, from academic achievement and career advancement, to happiness and longevity.

That is why I co-founded my own advocacy group for housing and revitalization 4.5 years ago called “We The People - Baltimore County,” with the County’s former planning director. We saw this housing crisis coming, and we fought to get ahead of it. It is also why I have been serving on the board of the Southwest Visions Foundation, the community development corporation for Southwest Baltimore County, for the last six years. I am also a member of the Baltimore County Housing Committee of the Maryland Inclusive Housing Corporation, a non-profit serving those with intellectual or developmental disabilities. And I am a member of the NAACP Randallstown Branch, where we worked together to develop a vision of revitalization for Randallstown and Liberty Road.

Through these experiences, and through hundreds of individual sit-downs with elected leaders, government officials and families, we, as a campaign, have developed the most comprehensive plan for housing and revitalization in County history. It includes creating “HousingStat” to measure our performance and keep us accountable, overturning both councilmanic courtesy (where each councilmember has the final approval for any project in their district) and the 2024 Adequate Public Facilities Ordinance so that growth is tied to real investment in schools, roads and utilities rather than used as a de facto moratorium, requiring the County to make



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development decisions that are consistent with small area plans and its Master Plan, and overhauling and rebuilding the process for permits, approvals and inspections, among other things. Honolulu did this and increased its response times by 70%.

This passion and focus is the reason why former County Executive Jim Smith endorsed my campaign. He was the author of the Renaissance Initiative and we are promising to write its next chapter – it is our One County Initiative. It will create tens of thousands of new units of housing in the next twenty years, with the infrastructure improvements to match, while delivering revitalization all across our County (including at malls like Security Square and East Point, as well as post-WWII communities). And we will pair this together with affordable requirements for new developments by requiring 10-20% of units in each new development as affordable (as defined by 60% of Area Median Income) and rental assistance for poor renters to make real our commitment to housing for all. This ensures that teachers, healthcare workers, first responders and young families can afford to live in the communities they serve.

Ultimately, through legal reforms, accountability tools like “HousingStat” and community-driven smart growth, we can build a County where housing is abundant, opportunity is shared and families—homeowners and renters alike—can afford to live, work, learn and play.

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What resources are under-utilized in our County that could be used to increase economic growth?

"Baltimore County's challenge is not a lack of assets. It is a lack of coordination and strategy. Our economy is growing at roughly 0.6% GDP while comparable jurisdictions are closer to 5%. Incomes have declined for five consecutive years, and we are losing jobs in sectors like manufacturing, logistics, retail and hospitality. Our own ten-year Master Plan acknowledges what many residents and business leaders already know: Baltimore County lacks a comprehensive strategy for economic growth.

In reality, Baltimore County already possesses many of the resources necessary to drive growth: a highly educated workforce, major research universities, strategic logistics infrastructure, strong small business communities and significant redevelopment opportunities.



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The challenge is that these assets often operate in isolation rather than as part of a coordinated economic strategy.

The first step is building a stronger economic development structure. Today economic development, workforce development, tourism and agriculture are combined in a single department. Other successful counties separate these functions so they can operate with clearer focus and stronger partnerships with the private sector. Baltimore County should do the same by creating a true jobs department dedicated to business attraction, expansion and retention while allowing workforce development to operate as its own mission-driven organization. We also need more staff focused specifically on economic development. Currently the County has only a handful of professionals dedicated to this work, while comparable jurisdictions maintain much larger teams.

At the same time, we must modernize how government interacts with businesses. Entrepreneurs and investors are highly sensitive to time and predictability. A fragmented permitting, licensing and inspection system signals risk, while a transparent and responsive system signals partnership. By upgrading permitting technology, coordinating interdepartmental reviews, enhancing systemic agility so that government can move at the speed of business and creating a clear concierge-style “no wrong door” approach, Baltimore County can turn one of its most under-utilized resources, public administration, into a competitive advantage.

Another under-utilized resource is our local small business ecosystem. From Main Street retailers and family-owned companies to emerging entrepreneurs, small businesses form the backbone of Baltimore County’s economy. Strengthening direct outreach, providing technical support and ensuring small businesses have a clear point of contact within County government can help these enterprises expand, hire and reinvest in their communities.

We should also intentionally cultivate a stronger startup ecosystem. Baltimore County already has remarkable innovation assets, including UMBC, Towson University, CCBC, the bwtech@UMBC incubator and a growing digital health corridor. As I argued in a Baltimore Sun op-ed

(<https://www.baltimoresun.com/2025/07/07/baltimore-county-can-be-the-next-silicon-valley-guest-commentary/>)(<https://www.baltimoresun.com/2025/07/07/baltimore-county-can-be-the-next-silicon-valley-guest-commentary/>) I co-authored last year about how our region could become “the



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next Silicon Valley,” the narrative for Baltimore County should not be one of scarcity but of abundance.

One of our most under-utilized resources is the extraordinary talent produced by these institutions. Every year thousands of students graduate from universities and colleges across our region, yet too many leave because they do not see clear career pathways here. By partnering with universities, incubators and employers through initiatives like Solution Labs and workforce pipelines, Baltimore County can better retain this talent and turn brain drain into brain gain.

Innovation already exists here, but the County government needs to act as a connector. That means working directly with incubators and accelerators, partnering with universities on Solution Labs and helping startups access mentorship networks and local procurement opportunities so promising companies can scale here.

Ultimately, our long-term strategy should be based on cluster-driven economic growth. Baltimore County possesses extraordinary assets across multiple industries, but they often operate in isolation. When clusters are intentionally cultivated, they create compounding returns. Logistics and advanced manufacturing in the southeast, anchored by Tradeport Atlantic and Martin State Airport, federal contracting and cybersecurity around Woodlawn, digital health and life sciences connected to UMBC and bwtech, and education and healthcare anchors in Towson, can all become engines of regional growth when supported with targeted investment, workforce pipelines and dedicated economic development activity that attracts related firms.

Our workforce itself is one of the County’s most important under-utilized resources. By expanding apprenticeships, workforce training and partnerships with unions, community colleges and employers, we can ensure that residents have direct pathways into growing industries while helping businesses find the skilled workers they need.

Finally, we must recognize that housing and transportation are economic development tools. Last year, the State Comptroller identified both as major barriers to growth across Maryland, but specifically in Baltimore County. When housing supply is constrained or transit connections between employment centers are weak, businesses struggle to recruit talent and workers struggle to access opportunity. Transit-oriented development and mixed-use districts, therefore,



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support entrepreneurship and small business growth just as much as traditional economic policy.

Another major under-utilized resource is the County's aging commercial corridors and retail centers. Properties such as Security Square, Eastpoint and commercial corridors along Liberty Road or Eastern Boulevard sit on valuable land with existing infrastructure but are currently underperforming economically. With modern planning and mixed-use redevelopment, these sites can become vibrant job centers and community hubs.

In short, Baltimore County's most under-utilized resource is not land or capital. It is coordination. If we align our institutions, modernize government systems, cultivate startups and intentionally build industry clusters, we can transform a collection of strong but disconnected assets into a unified and thriving regional economy."

What law enforcement issues do you see as the biggest challenge in the County and how would you protect County residents from ICE raids?

"The most immediate law enforcement challenge facing Baltimore County is staffing. We are currently down roughly 300 officers, and another 300 retirements are expected within the next 18 months.

Addressing this shortage will require an aggressive recruitment and retention strategy, including hiring up to 600 new highly qualified officers, expanding recruitment pipelines and retaining experienced officers through competitive compensation and better support resources.

That shortage makes it harder to maintain the level of proactive policing that our communities deserve. When departments are stretched thin, officers are forced to focus primarily on calls for service rather than the kind of sustained community engagement that builds trust and helps prevent crime before it occurs. I am only candidate in this race with a some law enforcement background and have had extensive conversations with officers and first responders about the challenges they face every day.

Addressing this challenge requires more than simply hiring more officers. We must strengthen the entire public safety strategy. That includes expanding data-driven approaches such as



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transforming BCStat into CrimeStat, a real-time strategic decision-making platform that improves crime classification, drives deployment decisions, enhances inter-agency collaboration and provides public transparency so communities can see how their police department is responding to crime trends.

Modern policing also requires modern tools. We should expand investments in technologies that help officers solve crimes and prevent violence.

Furthermore, our strategy should include targeting repeat violent offenders who drive a disproportionate share of crime and improving coordination between law enforcement and community partners.

We also need to invest more heavily in programs that reach at-risk youth before they become involved in the criminal justice system, including proven programs such as Roca Inc., the UMBC Choice program and Community Schools that combine accountability with mentorship and opportunity. We also need to invest more heavily in programs that reach at-risk youth before they become involved in the criminal justice system and modernize both the police department and the Public Safety Academy so that training, recruitment and technology reflect the realities of modern policing.

Fundamentally, public safety depends on community trust. That principle is especially important when discussing federal immigration enforcement. Baltimore County's law enforcement agencies should remain focused on local public safety responsibilities, not civil immigration enforcement. On my first day in office, I would terminate the County's memorandum of understanding with ICE that allows local officers to participate in federal immigration enforcement activities. Local resources should be dedicated to protecting our communities, not conducting federal immigration operations.

If ICE conducts enforcement activity within Baltimore County, it must comply with the Constitution and with due process protections. First of all, transparency is an absolute necessity. The County should produce public reports on known or suspected ICE enforcement activity so residents understand what is occurring in their communities. Secondly, The County should be prepared to challenge unlawful actions when necessary. Other jurisdictions have shown that, in addition to being more lawful and moral, standing up for local authority can also be more fiscally



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responsible than unmitigated compliance. As a lawyer, I am more than prepared to defend the rights of our residents in court if federal authorities overstep legal boundaries.

At the same time, County government should adjust how it delivers services so immigrant residents can safely access healthcare, food assistance and other resources. It starts with establishing a fully staffed Office of Immigration Affairs with dedicated community outreach and advocacy teams. We must bring services directly into communities through trusted local partners rather than requiring people to visit government buildings where fear may prevent them from seeking help, while enhancing digital, multi-lingual access to appropriate services. No one in Baltimore County should feel that they are an “other” or that they cannot seek help when they need it.

By strengthening our law enforcement strategy while protecting the rights of all residents, Baltimore County can remain both safe and unified."

Much is talked about protecting "mom and pop" businesses; in Baltimore County, however, big chains prevail. What is your vision and plan to address this?

"For many years, Baltimore County has watched its local businesses steadily give way to national chains. Part of the reason is structural. After World War II, we designed much of our development around the car. That model weakened traditional main streets in favor of malls. Over time, those malls were overtaken by big box retailers, and today many of those same spaces are losing ground to large online platforms like Amazon. The result is a landscape where independent businesses struggle to compete and where many commercial areas lack the authenticity and community energy that small businesses help create.

Small businesses are also one of the most powerful engines of job creation in local economies. Supporting them is not just about preserving community character; it is central to building a resilient and growing economy in Baltimore County.

That challenge also creates an opportunity. If we plan intentionally, Baltimore County can return to the vibrancy and authenticity of real town centers. Revitalizing aging commercial corridors and greyfields into walkable mixed-use districts creates the conditions where local restaurants, retailers and service businesses can succeed. Places like Security Square Mall are prime



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examples of where redevelopment into inclusive mixed-use environments could bring housing, public space and storefront activity together again. When people live nearby and public space is active, small businesses gain the steady foot traffic they need to survive.

To make that vision real, we must hold ourselves accountable to a clear and legally binding growth plan so redevelopment happens consistently rather than project by project. We also need to address structural barriers that favor large corporations over local entrepreneurs. Practices like councilmanic courtesy concentrate land-use decisions in ways that often advantage well-financed national chains that can navigate political systems more easily than a local café owner or childcare provider.

Supporting local businesses also requires practical tools. Redeveloped town centers can become expensive places to lease space, so the County should actively partner with state programs that help small businesses access financing and capital. Programs through the Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development, including Neighborhood BusinessWorks and initiatives supported through the State Small Business Credit Initiative, can provide significant investment when paired with private lenders. Those partnerships can help local entrepreneurs secure the resources they need to open and grow businesses in revitalizing areas. As a lawyer who has worked with small businesses and startups in Baltimore County for years, I have seen firsthand how initiatives like university-based Solution Labs, along with incubators and small accelerators, can play a vital role in helping local entrepreneurs launch and grow new opportunities.

Finally, the County government itself must be easier to work with. Entrepreneurs should encounter a predictable and coordinated process when opening a business.

Government must move at the speed of business rather than forcing entrepreneurs to navigate slow and fragmented systems.

That is why I will transform the County's Small Business Acceleration Team into a true Office of Business Assistance with a concierge-style "no wrong door" approach, guiding entrepreneurs through permitting, licensing and approvals so residents can focus on building their businesses rather than navigating bureaucracy.



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A true no-wrong-door Office of Business Assistance can guide applicants through permitting, licensing and approvals so residents can focus on serving customers rather than navigating bureaucracy.

Protecting “mom and pop” businesses ultimately means rebuilding the environments where they thrive. If Baltimore County commits to walkable mixed-use town centers, transparent land-use rules and real financial and operational support for entrepreneurs, we can restore the vibrancy of local commerce and ensure that small businesses once again form the backbone of our economy.”