



2026 Candidate Questionnaire

Candidate Name: Karson Kamenetz

Position: County Council

District: 4

What is your position regarding the Councilmanic Courtesy norm?

"It is not unusual for legislative bodies to give added weight to bills affecting a specific community proposed by the legislator representing that community. That is not necessarily inappropriate. Residents deserve elected leaders that know their streets, their schools, their traffic patterns, and the history of a neighborhood. However, Baltimore County's ""Councilmanic Courtesy"" has evolved far beyond community advocacy into what we see today: a *de facto* one-member vote. Today, if a project is in your district, everyone else ""defers.""" If you don't like it, the project dies, often regardless of the merits.

That is not democratic. It is not transparent. It is certainly not good governance. It has effectively turned land use decisions into seven separate fiefdoms instead of a countywide approach. In practice, this courtesy has made it too easy for single Councilmembers to block or downzone projects that would substantially contribute to our housing and affordability crises. I consider this to be legislative malpractice and simply unacceptable.

I am opposed to Councilmanic Courtesy in its current form, and particularly as it pertains to zoning and development decisions. Such decisions radically shape affordability, growth, and equity in this county, and should therefore be made collectively and with the lights on. Decisions should be made based on the Comprehensive Plan and Master Plan with objective criteria and evidence, not backroom courtesy or informal vetoes.

When elected, I will simply refuse to treat courtesy as a veto on housing or economic development projects that meet the plan and specific standards. I will support procedural reforms opposing any provisions that require a single district-member to approve projects. Lastly, I will also require transparency and written reasoning when major downsizing or project-decimating decisions are made, because residents deserve to see why something is being blocked so to hold us accountable.

Local input should be powerful. Local vetoes should not be. "



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What concrete steps will you take to address the acute shortage of affordable housing in Baltimore County? Please include your position on the current Urban-Rural Demarcation Line.

"Baltimore County has an acute housing problem that has dramatically worsened the national affordability crisis here at home. We simply do not have enough supply, homes are not affordable, and there is too much delay or uncertainty to secure investment. As a result, we must change course to grow our supply. This will be done through a two-pronged approach: taking advantage of the tools already at our disposal while simultaneously finding fresh solutions to many old problems preventing housing growth.

First and foremost, I support maintaining the current Urban-Rural Demarcation Line (URDL) as it stands, today. Our green spaces, 200 miles of waterfront, and 2000 miles of streams and tributaries not only make Baltimore County a uniquely beautiful place to live, but also keeps infrastructure costs from exploding. That is why the URDL is so important; it limits growth to where it is most affordable and sustainable for renters and buyers while protecting our County's identity. While studies have demonstrated that over 80% of the land within the URDL has already been developed, much of that 80% is ripe for redevelopment, restoration, and infill.

Within the URDL, and particularly near town centers, key economic corridors, and by transit, I will aggressively push for zoning reform (the first since the County was chartered) that permits accessory dwelling units (ADUs), small infill projects that fit the character of the surrounding community, and legalization of ""missing middle"" redevelopment that produces duplexes, triplexes, small multifamily units, and courtyard apartments. If we want to have a real housing ladder in Baltimore County, we must swiftly address the lack of ""missing middle"" housing within the URDL, and making such redevelopment and infill easier is the first step in doing this.

Simultaneously, infill and redevelopment is simply not enough to tackle the whole of this housing crisis. When a developer or investor wants to build in Baltimore County, they face a litany of obstacles that make it more costly and less efficient to get a shovel in the ground. For example, the average wait for a residential permit in Baltimore County is seven months. To redevelop a restaurant along Reisterstown Road in Pikesville, the minimum parking requirements make it near-impossible. I cannot tell you how many times I have heard ""land costs"" as a barrier to



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good projects breaking dirt. Because of these factors (and many others that I will not bore you with), we do not deserve to act surprised when large project developers choose to avoid Baltimore County for neighboring jurisdictions with laxed requirements. This also makes the solution simple and logical. If a project complies with our Comprehensive Plan, meets minimum design standards, and hits affordability requirements, the County should approve such projects ""by-right"" or in a permitting ""fast lane."" This will cut delay costs (which become rent) and prevent good projects from ""death by politics.”

The County has many tools at its disposal to enable homes to be built faster. However, building homes quickly may not contribute enough to the affordability problem, fast enough. That is why, when we implement ""by right"" construction or expediting permitting that cut costs for developers and incentivize investment, we should be asking for tangible affordability requirements in return. When the County is aligned with a proposed project and seeks to upzone, grant major density, or provide public support, I will ask for on-site set-asides for affordability and clear income targets to ensure our teachers, first-responders, and nurses are able to live near their occupation.

Today, much of Baltimore County's ""affordable homes"" are not technically ""affordable housing."" They're often older garden apartments, modest rental units, and small homes that run cheaper simply because they are older. When such properties are acquired, then either renovated or demolished to make way for more upscale development, the outcome is often not as affordable as the homes were previously. When this happens, the County then has to build more affordable units to maintain the amount of affordable supply available to prospective renters and buyers, which is not always feasible. This means we have to safeguard Naturally Occurring Affordable Housing (NOAH) where it makes sense so to offset this redevelopment. This starts with finding vulnerable buildings and making their preservation a priority. It continues by actively working with State and Federal partners to ensure low-interest loans, gap financing, and grants are available to assist property owners in purchasing and improving their buildings, but only when they commit to certain affordability measures that do not displace their current residents.

The last point I will make here relates to public land. The County has been successful in the past with RFPs for mixed-income housing on County-owned sites near transit and services, but



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the County has also been unsuccessful. We should be bringing more success in this way, and especially in areas like Security Square, with aggressive usage of state and federal tools and tax-incremented financing (TIFs) to fill financing gaps for good projects.

So that is my approach. Protect the URDL, build more inside of it, make approvals more predictable for builders, require affordability, preserve existing units, and take advantage of the public assets we have to deliver at scale."

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

"Baltimore County is sitting on the closest thing to ""Texas oil"" when it comes to economic growth, and we are still not fully leveraging our assets that create jobs, incentivize investment, and build a more resilient tax base sufficient to fund the next generation of life in Baltimore County. The solution is aligning land use, infrastructure, and workforce strategy into a real plan for the next 10 years that grows our County in a way that is sustainable.

First, we must fully utilize our logistics and industrial engine. I say all of the time, Tradepoint Atlantic, the Port of Baltimore, BWI, and Martin State Airport are the closest things we have to Texas oil. It is time to drill (figuratively, of course. I do not want to frack Pikesville!). We should be actively marketing the County as a unified logistics and aerospace hub tied to this logistics and industrial ecosystem. We can prioritize freight access and infrastructure like roads, rails, and utilities to unlock the private investment we need to create good jobs and grow our tax base for the next generation of Baltimore County life. But these two mechanisms only work if we tie such growth to workforce development pipelines. Our trade organizations, unions, and community colleges are uniquely strong here in Baltimore County, and businesses go where talent is anchored. So I will partner with stakeholders at CCBC and our unions to ensure students know from high school that these options are available, and make it easier for their education to naturally transition into these strong job placements. This will put Baltimore County on the map from an economic development standpoint, but will also grow our tax base with new residents and businesses that see an opportunity to capitalize on it.



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Aside from our ""texas oil,"" we are leaving value on the table around transit. Places like Lutherville Station should be models for mixed-use, walkable growth. Instead, the project was downsized and delayed despite checking all of the right boxes. At Lutherville Station, there should be housing over retail, small business space, and public realm improvements. Projects like that demonstrate how we can grow the tax base here at home without sprawling over the green space and waterfront that form our County's identity. Lutherville Station is not alone. The problem is vast, so we should be creating more station-area plans with clear zoning and design standards to enable projects to ""pass go"" if they meet the plan. We should be taking advantage of public-private partnerships to upgrade sidewalks, create new lighting, bike connections, and street art that make transit-oriented development actually work. This could be a real opportunity for small businesses as well by setting aside affordable commercial space and supporting local tenants throughout this process.

Across my district in particular, we experience what I call ""benign neglect."" When small problems persist for years, like broken crosswalks or empty storefronts, they become so normal that they are forgotten about. When those small, seemingly ""benign"" issues then multiply, we see the blight and structural decay apparent on key economic corridors that were once thriving years ago. Throughout the county, large stretches of economic corridors are half-vacant or simply unproductive, despite sitting on high-value land. This makes the task clear: we must be redeveloping them into mixed use ""main streets,"" with housing, services, neighborhood retail, offices, and clinics. Especially within the URDL where the infrastructure for such redevelopment exists already.

Lastly, County government itself has limited economic growth on the ground. Every investor tells the same story: the two biggest barriers to shovels in the ground are uncertainty and delay. Accordingly, my office will treat permitting, inspections, and procurement as economic development. That means predictable timelines for projects, transparent rules that do not slow-walk a ""yes"" into a ""no,"" and timely approvals for projects that check all of the boxes on pre-adopted plans. Importantly, we must get serious about creating pathways on contract procurement for local and minority-owned businesses. It should not be the same folks receiving the same contracts over and over again because of a contribution to an elected official. Baltimore County contract procurement should be based on merit and equity, nothing more and nothing less.



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At the end of the day, we have a great engine for economic growth in Tradepoint, the Port, BWI, and Martin State. We also have the land use opportunity for TODs and mixed-use redevelopment. The question is then how we utilize these resources together into one strategy that grows jobs, grows the tax base to face the problems of tomorrow, and creates real opportunity for County residents."

What is the greatest need in the district you are seeking to represent and what are your plans to address it?

"The new District 4 is the most diverse district in the County. Not just demographically or ethnically, but also socio-economically. Simultaneously, it is one of the oldest districts in the County. This makes it clear that the greatest need in the district is not just affordability, but also stability. Folks that lived in and built our great inner-beltway communities are being priced out by rising property taxes and fees. Our older adults and seniors are not adequately provided with the tools and resources at their disposal to make life more affordable, like loans for hand-bar and grab-bar installations that make aging-in-place possible. Young families are doing the math and realizing Baltimore County is not set up for them anymore, despite doing everything right. These problems manifest as higher housing costs, rising rents, stagnant wages, retirement incomes without COLAs that can no longer cover the cost of living, and ultimately a growing sense that Baltimore County is not keeping up.

My platform is simple. First, we lower housing costs by increasing supply within the URDL (as detailed in a previous question). By legalizing ""missing middle"" housing near corridors and transit, by-right approvals for projects that make sense and include affordability mechanisms, and requiring real affordability when granting density, we can make a real dent into the missing supply and lower costs. Second, we target our economic development around our ""texas oil"" assets like TPA and Martin State while simultaneously reinforcing workforce pipelines with unions and CCBC so district residents are first in line for jobs with good wages. Third, we make it easier to live a daily life here. That means reinvesting in crumbling infrastructure on Reisterstown Road with a ""road restoration"" program that makes it possible to turn left again, ensures our sidewalks are ADA compliant, stormwater upgrades, and transit connections reducing household costs. It also means turning the Council office into a one-stop-shop for



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County services with fast response times, agency ""shot clocks,"" and follow-through sufficient to make residents believe government is truly working for them. Last, we improve public safety across the district, specifically as it pertains to reckless driving. We should be investing into quick-fix solutions for speeding that are tried and true, like mobile cameras in neighborhoods asking for them and speed bumps or traffic calming where appropriate. We should be supporting effective policing, but also accountability so to be tough on violent offenders but even tougher on the conditions that lead to violent crime like blight, decay, mental health, youth services, and homelessness. That means expanding mental health programs countywide while ensuring our young people have a place to be after school.

In all, we have to make it affordable to live in this District, possible to get ahead, and make County government truly deliver on quality of life issues that compound with the affordability crisis and force people to leave. "