

**Candidate Name:** Sharonda Dillard-Huffman

**Position:** Baltimore County Council

**District:** 8

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**What is your position regarding the Councilmanic Courtesy norm?**

I've worked with legislators and legislative bodies across the State of Maryland, and I have never witnessed anything like what is happening in Baltimore County. Our County Council should be making legislative decisions grounded in facts, transparency, and meaningful input from both professionals and the community they serve.

Too often, critical decisions are made behind closed doors or guided by the outdated practice of "councilmanic courtesy" — a custom that allows one councilmember to unilaterally shape outcomes that affect the entire county. I've testified before the Council and written opinion pieces expressing my deep concern about this practice. It undermines public trust, discourages civic engagement, and prevents Baltimore County from growing equitably and responsibly.

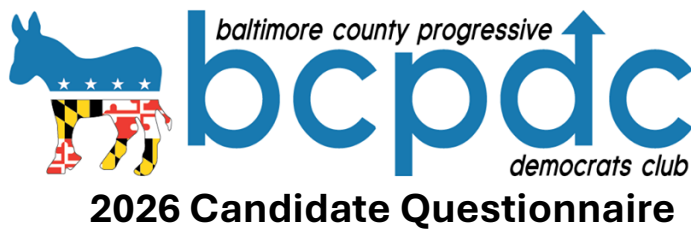
I have witnessed my councilman add Eastpoint Mall to the Essex Revitalization area. There was no conversation with Essex CDC. Even though council was made aware, there was no discussion and the bill passed.

**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 Dividing Line.**

As Chair of the Maryland Inclusive Housing Committee for Baltimore County and a housing professional employed by a statewide and national leader in affordable/mixed income housing, I am actively addressing the region's housing shortage. I work directly with developers who are creating accessible and inclusive housing for seniors and persons with disabilities, ensuring that every project aligns with both community needs and fair housing principles. Under the current federal Administration and ongoing changes at HUD, no one can say anything is concrete. However, I receive weekly updates from a national housing organization.

Our committee meets regularly with the Baltimore County Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD), and a subset of our members recently met with the department's full leadership team. We are now forming subcommittees to deepen our advocacy and advisory work across key areas — including policy, administrative plan, waitlist management, accessible housing, and public education. We are constantly updated on compliance with the Voluntary Consent Agreement..

Collaboration and education are at the heart of our approach. I've offered to host tours of successful



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mixed-income housing developments in Montgomery County to help local leaders see firsthand how inclusive and economically diverse communities can thrive. Baltimore County must take similar steps by streamlining its development processes across Planning, Budget, and DHCD to ensure innovation is not slowed by bureaucracy.

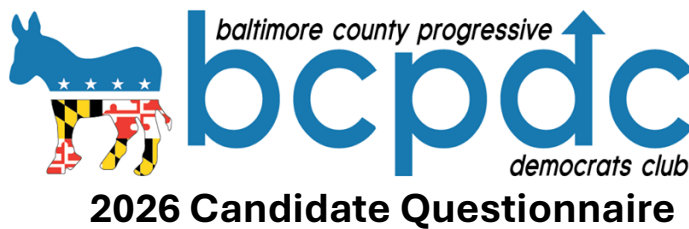
From my experience working in Baltimore City, where all major development and revitalization projects were vetted through a project review committee of state and local officials, I know that a coordinated, transparent process can produce results that serve both residents and developers. We can and must bring that same structure and urgency to Baltimore County's housing strategy. I will bring my state and city government real estate expertise to the office. I also helped pass an inclusionary housing law in the city. I think we should codify the prior County Executive's Executive Order requiring developers seeking county assistance must make some units affordable.

#### Other Steps

1. I also believe in concerted efforts to eliminate blight and help revitalize aging homes by having a program similar to Montgomery County to provide resources to create accessory dwelling units.
2. The county needs to identify areas of development in each district and there has to be more density to reduce the need to explore additional areas for units. We need to make a plan and try our best to stick to it.
3. Affordable housing can be achieved through creating workforce housing like in Remington - Baltimore City where one is incentivized by living where they work. Building homes specifically with for county employees can rent. Any infrastructure costs should be invested by developer. Also we should have incentives for home buying.
4. As a councilwoman, I would advocate for a housing/zoning committee vet legislation before being presented to the Committee of the Whole.
- 5 Work with DHCD to explore having the HUD program for voucher recipients go through financial sustainability classes to use their voucher to purchase a home.
6. Requiring the council to have committees and hold hearings with departments should help reduce short sighted bills that slow down the development process.

#### URDL

I'll admit — I don't know what I don't know. But what I do know is that Baltimore County can't keep



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pretending that environmental preservation and housing equity are opposing goals. I become deeply concerned when environmental advocates refuse to acknowledge the racial, economic, and class segregation the Urban Rural Demarcation Line (URDL) has intentionally or unintentionally reinforced.

While the Comprehensive Zoning Map Process (CZMP) is supposed to plan for the entire county, our own planning department has been repeatedly blocked from doing so. Instead, fear-mongering too often fills the gap. I've said this before in my opinion piece for the Baltimore Banner: we can explore new development options without endangering our water supply — but we can't afford to stop exploring altogether.

Comprehensive economic growth requires comprehensive planning. Comptroller Brooke Lierman's report made it clear: housing is Maryland's biggest challenge, and Baltimore County is no exception. Yet we continue to allow NIMBY ("Not In My Backyard") politics and councilmanic courtesy to derail projects that could make our county more inclusive, more affordable, and more sustainable. When a few voices can kill a project meant to serve thousands, everyone loses.

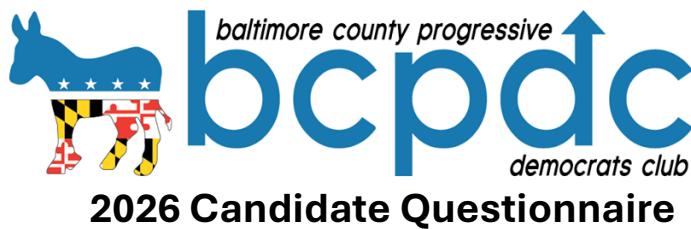
Op-ed in Banner (March 2025)

Baltimore County's housing crisis is worsening, with rising rents, a shortage of affordable housing and systemic barriers to homeownership leaving many residents struggling. Yet, the county's Urban Rural Demarcation Line, established in 1967 before the Fair Housing Act, continues to limit where new housing can be built (There's a push to make rural Baltimore County even more untouchable — despite housing crisis, March 3, 2025). While intended to control sprawl and preserve green space, it now restricts responsible development, making it harder to address our growing housing needs.

With much of the land inside the URDL already built out, large-scale affordable housing projects are nearly impossible without expensive redevelopment. Expanding development beyond the URDL doesn't mean unchecked sprawl — it means smart, equity-driven planning that balances growth with sustainability. By allowing targeted mixed-income communities, workforce housing and housing for persons with disabilities, we can create economic opportunities, reduce housing segregation, and ensure every resident has access to safe and attainable housing.

How is Baltimore County affirmatively furthering fair housing? The housing crisis demands bold solutions, not outdated restrictions. Baltimore County must reevaluate the URDL and embrace policies that reflect today's realities. It's time to prioritize people over arbitrary boundaries and build a future where housing is accessible for all.

Sharonda Dillard-Huffman is a candidate for Baltimore County Council.



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

Baltimore County's Chambers of Commerce are an underutilized engine for economic growth. They should be doing more than hosting ribbon cuttings — they can serve as hubs for workforce development, small business mentorship, and local tourism promotion.

Imagine if our Chambers worked directly with our high schools to offer internships, job shadowing, and mentor-based business training. These partnerships could prepare young people for future careers while strengthening ties between education and industry.

Chambers should also lead professional development programs for entrepreneurs, recruit new businesses to underserved areas, and collaborate with our tourism office to highlight local gems — especially along our beautiful waterfront. If Prince George's County can transform its waterfront into a destination like National Harbor, then Baltimore County can certainly showcase Essex, Middle River, and the Chesapeake Gateway corridor with the same pride.

Finally, we need the courage to pilot innovative policies. One example is exploring a limited "liquor in supermarkets" pilot program to evaluate its impact on small businesses and consumer access. Instead of assuming harm, let's gather the data, listen to local merchants, and craft solutions that work for everyone.

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

The new district 8 has persons who are unhoused to persons who want modernized schools, libraries. My answer is identifying funding sources as the County Executive has the power of the purse. We need to create jobs by revitalizing homes and schools and replacing the Essex Library. I think we should request funding through the county capital budget process as well as federal earmarks for Middle River Library.

I have been meeting with state and federal partners to support the National infrastructure Bank legislation with bills like the National Infrastructure Bank Act of 2025 (H.R. 5356) and the Federal Infrastructure Bank Act of 2025 (H.R. 1235) making progress. These proposals aim to create a new institution to provide financing for major infrastructure projects through loans, equity investments, and loan guarantees, and to supplement existing funding mechanisms, not replace them.