

Question 6:

Everyone acknowledges that projects take too long to get approved in Anne Arundel County. What will you do to speed up project reviews without compromising environmental protections and sustainability?

Question 6 responses

The following four candidates, listed alphabetically, are running in the Democratic primary:

James Kitchin

We must get to an actionable decision faster. But to be clear, if the project doesn't meet code requirements then that decision could be "no." Delays in permitting add unnecessary costs that get passed on to renters and buyers. We will follow the lead of innovative cities like Honolulu and South Bend by integrating modern AI tools into our Office of Inspections and Permits. These tools can handle the initial intake and compliance review for development permits, freeing up our expert staff to focus on more complex issues and speeding up the entire process without compromising quality or safety, or needing to hire additional county staff.

Kyle Nembhard

I would encourage more engagement with project development by our office of Planning and Zoning. This helps to streamline the development process by reducing the risk of extensive comment periods. The complexity and duration of the approval process should mirror the complexity of each project.

Allison Pickard

Our development and redevelopment projects take too long to move through the approval process in Anne Arundel County. Delays create uncertainty, increase costs, and make it harder to deliver housing, infrastructure, redevelopment, and economic development projects in a timely and affordable way. At the same time, we must continue to uphold strong environmental protections and sustainability standards. When elected, I will focus on making the review process more predictable, coordinated, and efficient without weakening environmental safeguards. I will establish clear timelines and accountability standards for project reviews across county departments and agencies. Applicants and residents alike deserve a process that is transparent, consistent, and not subject to unnecessary delays. I will improve interagency coordination so reviews happen concurrently rather than sequentially whenever possible. Too often, projects are delayed

because agencies are operating independently or providing conflicting guidance late in the process. I will prioritize modernization of the county's permitting and review systems through improved technology, digital submissions, and real-time project tracking so applicants, staff, and the public can better monitor progress and identify bottlenecks early. I also support expedited review pathways for affordable housing projects and redevelopment projects that align with county planning goals. Projects that provide attainable housing, revitalize underutilized properties, or advance smart-growth objectives should not spend years navigating avoidable procedural delays. In addition, I will create a dedicated "project navigator" position within county government to help guide small-scale applicants, homeowners, nonprofit organizations, and affordable housing developers through the permitting and review process. Many smaller projects—including ADUs, Missing Middle housing, and community-based redevelopment efforts—lack the resources to navigate a highly fragmented regulatory system. A navigator program will improve communication, reduce delays, and help applicants resolve issues earlier in the process. Importantly, speeding up reviews should not mean weakening environmental protections. Anne Arundel County's waterways, forests, and sensitive environmental areas are critical assets that must be protected. Instead, we should focus on clearer standards, earlier coordination, and more efficient administration so applicants understand expectations upfront and environmentally responsible projects can move more quickly through the process. Finally, I support regular public reporting on permitting timelines and review performance so the county can measure progress, identify delays, and ensure accountability. The goal should be a system that is both efficient and responsible—one that protects our environment while allowing well-planned housing, redevelopment, and community investment projects to move forward in a timely and predictable manner.

Pete Smith

I would encourage more engagement with project development by our office of Planning and Zoning. This helps to streamline the development process by reducing the risk of extensive comment periods. The complexity and duration of the approval process should mirror the complexity of each project

Dave Crawford -- Running unopposed in the Republican Primary

Delays in Anne Arundel's permitting process hurt everyone: homeowners waiting to renovate, small businesses trying to open, and even affordable housing projects stuck in bureaucratic limbo. The solution is not to weaken environmental standards — it is to modernize and professionalize the review process itself.

I will: (1) implement a unified digital permitting portal so applicants have a single point of

entry and real-time status tracking; (2) establish binding review timelines with clear escalation procedures when deadlines are missed; (3) hire and retain sufficient qualified staff — including environmental reviewers — so that backlogs don't accumulate; (4) create a pre-application consultation program so projects are designed to meet standards before submission, reducing costly back-and-forth; and (5) establish a Project Ombudsman office to resolve inter-agency bottlenecks.

Environmental review is not the enemy of speed — disorganization is. With the right systems, we can protect the Bay and our neighborhoods while delivering timely decisions that residents and businesses deserve.