

**Agricultural Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes  
October 18, 2016**

**Attendees:** Eleanor Leak, Linda Lewis, Aliza Fishbein, Pete Driscoll, Dave Weitzer, Paula Linthicum, Doug Lechluder

**Staff:** Jeremy Criss

**Guest:** Heather Bruskin, Manager of the Moco Food Council

1. Meeting called to Order 7:14 pm and Introductions
2. Approval of the September 20, 2016 AAC meeting minutes (Lewis/Driscoll)
3. **Funding for Farmland Preservation**

**The OAG, DEP, OMB, and Council Staff met on October 11, 2016.**

**DEP will not support WQPC funding for Ag Preservation-nutrient trading until regulatory framework is in place.**

**A briefing with the CE is scheduled for October 19, 2016.**

**DEP and OAG will brief the Council T&E/PHED Committees on October 20, 2016.**

DEP has been talking with OAG since January about using WQPC for ag easements as a nutrient trading program. There has been push back from the ag community that this would just move pollution around and doesn't ultimately help the Bay; that it helps polluters continue to pollute. DEP will not recommend any funding for this program until regulatory funding is in place for nutrient trading. OAG proposed a pilot program to get the baseline running and so far there are six farmers participating. Jeremy will report on Thursday to T&E on the final outcome with DEP.

4. **New Improvements and Communication Systems at the AHFP**

**The new Comcast Internet system (MSCD, OAG, & Extension is up and running.**

**The new Comcast Phone system is not working in all areas of the building.**

**The Federal Gov. will migrate to Fiber and replace their T-1 lines and phones.**

**All phone numbers for ag agency staff will be the same with the exception of FSA.**

Jeremy's phones don't work yet...

5. **ZTA 16-02 Agricultural Zone-Transferable Development Rights Requirements**

**The ZTA has yet to be scheduled on the Planning Board agenda-The MNCPPC staff indicated on September 23, 2016 they will have a draft ZTA to distribute soon.**

**The OAG may be asked to provide recommendations to the DPS and the MNCPPC on all requests for farm tenant dwellings.**

The ZTA will be distributed before it is submitted to the planning board. Jeremy said that he had hoped that Josh Penn would be attending the meeting to explain where the ZTA is at the MNCPPC.

#### **6. County Council Proclamation for Sara Lechliden-1<sup>st</sup> Runner Up Miss MD Agriculture**

**On Tuesday October 25, 2016 the County Council will recognize Sara Lechliden for winning 1<sup>st</sup> Runner Up Miss MD Agriculture**

Congratulations, Sara and the Lechliden family!!!

#### **7. Heather Bruskin, Manager of the Montgomery County Food Council**

**Heather will discuss the Food Council Food Action Plan and Food Hub Study recommendations.**

Please note that this portion of the agenda was discussed as #3.

Heather Bruskin, Food Council Manager of the Montgomery County Food Council, came in to speak with us. She began by providing a background on how the Food Council was created and what it does. Formed in 2012 with a budget from the County Executive's office, it was created to promote and encourage sustainability in our local food system. Today, the Food Council is an independent non-profit with a diverse funding stream. Jeremy's office has partnered with them since the very beginning.

The Food Council has 4 working groups.

- Environmental Impact
  - o This group hosted the On Farm Composting event last December
  - o It is currently working with Councilman Berliner on the food waste diversion bill
- Food Recovery and Access
- Food Economy
  - o Work to support producers; listing businesses headquartered or producing in the County (to supplement the Farm Directory) in a pamphlet, the point of which is to increase visibility
  - o Put together a food hub study and determined that it is not what the County needs/wants at this time. Heather will circulate the final report to Jeremy and the AAC.
- Food Literacy

The Food Council is creating a Food Action Plan for the County that will combine the areas of all four working groups. The main focus has been on a food security plan which came out of County Council legislation. They are holding listening sessions and bringing together a broad range of coalition partners. Linda raised her frustration that she cannot accept WIC at her farm

market despite having some excess in corn and other foods. This catalyzed a discussion of food deserts in rural areas and how members of the AAC would like to see more facilitation of feeding the hungry in those parts of the county. Ms. Bruskin supplied some statistics for hunger in the county, described needs, and how the food action plan will address them. She emphasized the purpose of the listening sessions as conduits for learning what our communities want and need. The five-year plan is due to the Council on Dec. 1, after which there will be a public comment period for one month.

**8. Bill 28-16 Solid Waste (Trash) Strategic Plan to Advance Composting, Compost Use and Food Waste Diversion:**

**The T&E Committee work session is scheduled for October 27, 2016.**

**The DEP has released a Request for Proposal-RFP for acceptable organics processing. Qualified companies must provide acceptance, processing and sales of an end product for certain Commercial and, eventually Residential Organics generally collected in MC.**

DEP's RFP is for companies who want to accept organics for processing for composting. This would be for a contractor to take the organic material out of the waste stream. On farm composting could be done on a small-scale basis while a larger scale bases would be problematic. Thus, the County needs to identify a site to accommodate the total volume of organic material generated each year. The bill is about exploring options. To the Food Council's knowledge, there is no place in the County that can fulfill the request of the RFP. Aliza shared her concerns about the unsustainability of trying to move the waste outside of the County. Jeremy has been in touch with folks at DEP and has shared Aliza's thesis paper on this topic with them. Aliza's paper is not finalized; it is still considered a draft as she is working to confirm the figures within.

**9. Bill 31-16 Taxation-Urban Agricultural Tax Credit**

[http://montgomerycountymd.granicus.com/MetaViewer.php?view\\_id=136&event\\_id=4564&meta\\_id=125072](http://montgomerycountymd.granicus.com/MetaViewer.php?view_id=136&event_id=4564&meta_id=125072)

**Council member Tom Hucker sponsored this Bill 31-16 which was introduced August 2, 2016 and the public hearing was September 20, 2016. The GO (Government Operations) Council Committee work session is scheduled for November 3, 2016.**

**The Bill can help reduce property taxes on small properties ½ acre up to 5 acres in urban areas that are also priority funding areas (Areas with public services).**

**The Bill defines urban agriculture, although the County Code Chapter 59 Zoning already defines Urban Farming.**

**The OMB has determined that Bill 31-16 as written could impact 36,300 taxable properties between ½ and 5 acres resulting in \$436.4 million in reduced tax revenue.**

The bill could encourage farming but could have impact on the county's tax rolls. OMB's view was that the eligibility criteria in the bill is quite broad. It would be a \$436.4 million reduction in tax revenue annually. As drafted, it would apply to both the improvement and the land. Councilman Hucker took a bill that was introduced in Baltimore in 2014 and drafted based on that proposed draft. Baltimore ultimately adopted a narrower bill than the initial draft. The OAG will suggest potential amendments after investigating what Baltimore ultimately did as a model.

#### **10. Follow Up on July 2016 Revised Assessment Notices**

The OAG has received some questions from farmers (Ben Allnutt, Robert Beall, David Weitzer, Linda Lewis) on their revised assessment notices and the property taxes for their farms have increased. The FY17 property tax rate was adopted by the County Council in May 2016.

[https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/COUNCIL/Resources/Files/res/2016/20160519\\_18-493.pdf](https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/COUNCIL/Resources/Files/res/2016/20160519_18-493.pdf)

The Council did not support the CE recommendation for implementing a modest increase in the FY17 property tax rates. The FY16 property tax rate was .9870 per \$100 of assessed value. The CE recommended an increase for FY17 of 1.0084 per \$100 of assessed value. The Resolution 18-493 adopted by the Council increased the FY17 property tax rate to \$1.0264 per \$100 of assessed value. During the June 9, 2016 Senior Management Team meeting the County Executive commented on the Council action regarding the property tax rate increase would be viewed by the County residents just like "sticker shock" when they see their tax bills. The OAG believes the increase in tax bills from the farmers are a result of the new property tax rate.

The majority of the increase is because of the County Council's action on the tax rate. They increased it to higher than what the Executive recommended. Above is the link to the approved tax rate.

#### **11. Bill 37-16 Taxation-Development Impact Tax-Transportation and Public Schools:**

**The Planning Board proposed an increase in the development impact tax that will increase the (Green Policy Area=Ag Reserve) transportation and public schools component of the impact tax from \$5,500 to \$29,225 per dwelling unit. The AAC forwarded a letter to the Council explaining how the increase in the development impact tax will negatively impact farmers. Council President forwarded the attached letter regarding how the impact tax should be imposed.**

[http://montgomerycountymd.granicus.com/MetaViewer.php?view\\_id=136&clip\\_id=12170&meta\\_id=125879](http://montgomerycountymd.granicus.com/MetaViewer.php?view_id=136&clip_id=12170&meta_id=125879)

The AAC submitted the letter that is in the meeting packet. We received a response from Council President Floreen. It addresses two issues: subdivision staging policy and Bill 37-16. There is a question as to when a subdivision is being staged when the developer pays the impact tax (beginning, as they go, or at the end? Floreen thinks it should be applied consistently across the county. The Green Policy Area is negatively impacted disproportionately by the Planning Board's draft. There is a work session this Thursday morning and Floreen's letter will be discussed in committee. There will be additional work sessions which Jeremy will monitor. Floreen's letter is encouraging because she was on P&P for a long time and knows the history behind this policy. Hopefully, it will encourage others councilmembers to amend this bill in a favorable way and help the agricultural community.

### **12. Follow up from Councilmember Craig Rice's Agricultural Reserve Meeting:**

**Big thanks to Linda Lewis, David Weitzer, Doug Lechliden, John Fendrick, Paula Linthicum, Lonnie Luther, Kathy Lyons, Robert Butz, Wade Butler, Billy Willard, Michael Jamison, Jim Clifford, Doug Tregoning, Bob Cissel, Jane Seigler, Amanda Cather, Diane Buric, Tanya Spandhla, Aliza Fishbein, and David Plummer for attending the meeting and setting up display tables. The event turnout was excellent (60-80 people) including an excellent turnout of farmers. Council member Rice is really interested in promoting more agricultural education and policies that will further promote and assist farmers in the Agricultural Reserve. The OAG has prepared a chart outlining all of the agricultural educational programs in the County from elementary school to College level.**

Follow up from the Oct 10 meeting that Councilman Rice sponsored. The goal of that meeting was multifaceted. Rice is Chair of the Education Committee. He has always advocated for more ag education programs in the schools – why not a magnet program for ag! Jackie Arnold put together every ag education initiative we currently have on a spreadsheet, which Jeremy passed around at the meeting. Some things are still missing and Jeremy will amend as necessary/based on suggestions. This was only the first of hopefully many such meetings. Jeremy will draft a thank you letter to Rice on behalf of the AAC and get Dave's approval to send it.

### **13. Next AAC meeting November 15, 2016 @ 7:00pm**

**Request from Aliza Fishbein regarding the January, February, March and April 2017 AAC meetings being moved to another evening due to conflicts with GW Food Law Class.**

The third Wednesday of the month was suggested as an alternative date for the AAC to meet. Jeremy will ask Melissa to put a hold on all Wednesdays just in case. It is just for the four months proposed.

14. Additional Item – Sugarland Rd. Update

Dave informed us that they are still working on getting high speed internet on Sugarland. Comcast has done all the work but suddenly there is no action out of them. They haven't started installing the lines. They will meet with Berliner to see if we can generate some action out of Comcast (meeting with him next week). Paula brought up the fact that it's difficult to get such infrastructure improvements because the Ag Reserve by definition has population limitations/requirements.

#### 15. Additional Item – Partnering Organizations

Paula raised a question – commenting that the Montgomery County Food Council is a partner with Town Creek Foundation and Fair Farms Maryland, which lists the Humane Society of the US as a partner of theirs on their website. Paula is concerned since a goal of HSUS is essentially the elimination of conventional animal agricultural production. Jeremy will look into this and report back at the next meeting.

#### Outlined below you will see Jeremy's findings:

The Moco Food Council is supported by the Town Creek Foundation and the Foundation does not have a specific vote on the Food Council. The funding from the Town Creek Foundation was used for the specific purpose of promoting on farm composting and food waste diversion.

The funding from Town Creek Foundation was used to support the December 3, 2015 On Farm Composting Forum which was cosponsored by the Office of Agriculture.

The Food Council signed on to Senator Richard Madaleno's Poultry Litter Bill that would require the owners of the birds to address the waste litter from the birds.

The Fair Farms MD is an organization for all Marylanders to work together for a new food system and that many Food Councils, food groups and local farmers have signed on as partners.

The Moco Food Council has consistently supported the efforts of the AAC since the Food Council was first established. The Moco Food Council has helped to promote several agricultural events and activities that ultimately benefits the farmers and improving the communication with residents living down county. The Office of Agriculture is an agency partner with the Food Council and we have worked together to promote our local farmers in the County in many ways. The Food Council was instrumental in recommending to the County Council that on farm composting standards in the zoning code needed to be flexible for the farmers. The Food Council was instrumental in recommending to the County Council Bill 28-16 Strategic Plan to Advance Compost, the use of compost and food waste diversion.

The OAG is very appreciative for the good work of the Food Council including the pending projects reported on during the October 18, 2016 AAC meeting. The OAG recommends the Montgomery County Agricultural Advisory Committee continue to partner with the Moco Food Council on agricultural and food promotion projects.

The AAC was created by the County government to advise the CE and the Council on all matters that relate to agriculture in the County.

The continued partnership with the Moco Food Council will only help to further educate the importance of agriculture and farming to all County residents.

These partnerships are a means of maintaining relationships for the purposes of dialogue.

For example, OAG and AAC have working relationships with the Montgomery Countryside Alliance - an organization in the rural community that does not always agree with the agricultural community. Nonetheless, we keep those avenues of communication open.

16. Adjournment (Driscoll/Lewis)

**Upcoming Meetings and Events:**

**Montgomery Agricultural Advisory Committee-October 18, 2016 @ 7:00pm**  
**T&E/PHED Committee Work Session-WQPC \$ for Ag Pres-October 20, 2016@2:00pm**  
**Council Proclamation for Sara Lechliden-1<sup>st</sup> Runner Up-Miss MD Agriculture-October 25, 2016**  
**T&E Committee Work Session-Bill 28-16 Composting Plan-October 27, 2016@9:30am**  
**Montgomery County Farm Bureau Board of Directors-November 1, 2016 Cancelled**  
**GO Com Work Session-Bill 31-16 Urban Ag Tax Credit-November 3, 2016@10:30am**  
**Agricultural Preservation Advisory Board-November 8, 2016 @ Cancelled**  
**MCFB Annual Dinner Banquet-November 9, 2016**  
**Montgomery Soil Conservation Board of Supervisors-November 18, 2016**