

I am a Montgomery County citizen, an elder in the Presbyterian Church USA, and a committed environmentalist. Greatly concerned with saving God's creation, I stand with the agricultural groups, community associations, and other stakeholders who have stated clearly and firmly opposition to ZTA 23-09. This ZTA has been proposed by Councilmember Fani-Gonzales (co-sponsored by Councilmembers Glass and Friedson) that would allow accessory structures for overnight accommodations in the Ag Reserve.

The Montgomery County Agricultural Reserve has been used as a model in other states to preserve farmland and protect farmers. Montgomery County has the highest percentage of farmland under agricultural land preservation easements in the nation. This highly successful model would be at risk if ZTA 23-09 is approved.

The ZTA demonstrates a stunning lack of understanding of the Reserve, the economic complexity of keeping farms viable and, importantly, supporting new diverse farm operations. It changes the definition of farming - by proposing this change under the Ag code instead of the commercial lodging code where it belongs, up to ten motel style units would be allowed as an accessory to an agritourism operation. They could be constructed anywhere in the Ag Reserve- including on prime soils and on land encumbered by ag easement funded by taxpayers- and have no connection to farming.

The proposed ZTA does not meet any of the fundamental purposes of the Ag Reserve to preserve working farms, open space and water resources. For these reasons, it should be rejected.

Please work to withdraw this ZTA.