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Subject: Opposition to ZTA 23-09: "Plus ça change ..."
Date: Jan 4, 2024 at 2:36:39 PM
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January 4, 2024

Dear Councilmembers:

As a resident of the Montgomery County Agricultural Reserve, I am writing to you in opposition of ZTA 23-09 "Outdoor Incidental Use in the Ag Reserve" which would allow construction of overnight dwellings on farms in the Agricultural Reserve. This ZTA is incongruent with the zoning regulations currently in place for the Agricultural Reserve, and if approved would drastically alter the vision and future of this land which is a nationally recognized area for preserving agriculture and open space to be enjoyed by all residents of Montgomery County and elsewhere.

ZTA 23-09 and how it was presented to the Agricultural Reserve community at Linden Farm in Dec 2023 by the sponsor of this bill, Councilmember Natali Fani-Gonzalez reminds me of a quote by the French writer Jean-Baptiste Alphonse Karr which states " Plus ça change, plus c'est la meme chose" – the more things change, the more they stay the same! How could such an injudicious ZTA be proposed by a councilmember? Didn't community stakeholders in our county work in close collaboration with county planners recently to rewrite the County's zoning code to modernize the zoning regulations? One purpose of this zoning rewrite is to discourage the frequent use of ZTAs by some individuals to chip away at the zoning code for their sole benefit without community stakeholder involvement. Why was public discourse nonexistent for this radical ZTA 23-09 that would forever change the rural and agricultural nature of the Ag

Reserve? I am very disappointed that a public conversation did not occur with the Ag Reserve community prior to the introduction of ZTA 23-09 on November 7, 2023. This ZTA is poorly constructed, incongruent with the current regulations for the AG reserve and detrimental to our rural community.

I am also perplexed in regards to how a ZTA can be introduced by a councilperson without data supporting the premise of the ZTA (improving agritourism) nor the co-sponsorship of the councilmembers who represent the community that will be affected by the zoning change. Should the council reconsider the ZTA process so that voices of the community members can be included prior to introduction of a ZTA to the county council? Should a councilmember who sponsors a ZTA be required to provide solid data to support their suppositions, and should this data be included as an appendix to the introduced ZTA? In writing e-mails to you, attending the meeting at Linden Farm and discussing ZTA 23-09 within our community has taken a significant toll on the time and resources of our community members. These efforts are not trivial and should not be disregarded. I implore the county council members to improve communication and involvement of the community while considering such extreme ZTAs as ZTA 23-09.

In closing, I request that the county council disapprove ZTA 23-09. In addition, I propose that avenues for collaboration be formed for stakeholders within Montgomery County, foremost those living within the AG reserve, to participate with county government officials in a risk/benefit assessment of proposals for additional agritourism initiatives within the Ag Reserve. I wish you all a very Happy New Year. Thank you for your service to Montgomery County.

Very Respectfully,

Carolyn Laurencot

