

Tiewyan Farms

Bev & Dick Thoms

Friday, January 5, 2024

Montgomery County Council

I would like to express my opposition to the proposed ZTA 23-09 for the Montgomery County Agricultural Reserve that would allow temporary lodging structures beyond the current zoning allowances.

First, I don't see the need for this ZTA;

For example, by using the development rights (TDRs) accrued to a 200 acre farm, subdividing it to add 7 additional residences would be acceptable under the existing zoning. If the TDRs have been sold off, then this proposed activity would amount to "double dipping" and is nothing more than land speculation.

The stated goal of the ZTA is to stimulate economic development in the Ag. Reserve.

Commercial economic development in the Ag Reserve will serve to drive up land prices, which will make the inheritance taxes beyond the reach of many family farmers, which, in turn, will bring farming to an end in Montgomery county within 2 generations or less. You only need look across the Potomac to see what will happen.

We have lived on our 57 acre farm since 1974, where we have grown peaches and apples and Hay, and 4 kids. Our sheep and cattle graze sustainably through rotation between pastures that are buffered from adjacent streams. In 1980 when our land zoning was downgraded from 5 acre zoning to 25 acre zoning as part of the Agricultural reserve, we were compensated with transferrable development rights, and the promise that surrounding property would have no more than 1 house and septic system for every 25 acres served by the sole source aquifer. Also, multiple preservation options were made available that offered additional compensation if we were to preserve the land for agricultural use in perpetuity.

In addition to these promises, preservation of the environmental benefits of open space, recreation, local food supply, and family farming culture and services would accrue to all Montgomery county residents, especially those living in the reserve.

This ZTA is just the latest in a long list of ill-conceived schemes to undermine the promise of the Agricultural Reserve in order to achieve commercial – not farming – interests.

We request that this ZTA be either rejected or withdrawn from consideration.

Sincerely,

Richard W. Thoms