

I write to oppose the introduction of zoning amendment ZTA 23-09.

This amendment if adopted holds the potential for sweeping changes affecting the storied Montgomery County Agricultural Reserve.

In the unparalleled creation of 92,000+ acres for farming and agriculture, your predecessors had the foresight to acknowledge the continued need to preserve wide expanses of fertile, farmland for future generations and the greater good.

The Orwellian mangling of the definition of farming to now include "Agritourism" threatens the very acreage formally set aside for protection and preservation.

And there lies the rub: "To Protect and Preserve" – it sounds so very dull and too often interpreted to run counter to the phrase that trumps all others "the need for Progress".

Council Member Fani-Gonzales believes the Ag Res has a "problem" that needs addressing and that the answer to this problem is the expansion of "Agritourism" in the form of new build overnight living accommodation on currently protected farming land.

The Ag Res serves a much larger population than those who dwell within it. There is no lack of "foot fall" for the varied businesses fortunate enough to operate here. The assertion of a "problem" is therefore spurious and many of my neighbors believe that this amendment is merely a contrivance in order to disguise a proposal which serves only a few "bad actors" who have recently surfaced in the area.

To summarize, the areas of concern for many of us:

1. A lack of consultation with the population most affected, namely the residents of the Ag Res. One must wonder if democracy is still a functioning concept in Montgomery County. At the SCA meeting with Council Member Fani-Gonzales the overwhelming feeling was hostile to the amendment as presented.
2. The assertion that no overnight accommodation is offered in the area is patently untrue. Rockville, Frederick, Germantown to name just a few surrounding areas are a handful of miles outside the Ag Res and there are already B & B's, Airbnb's and the like offered within existing buildings on the Ag Reserve.
3. Concerns about the creation of new infra structure to support this endeavor. From additional supplies of water, sewage, power, roads, e vehicle charging stations, to additional fire dept. and police resources.
4. The environmental impact will be extensive not only through the farmland destroyed on the Ag Res, but also additional waste generated.
5. At a time when the world is struggling to produce enough food to feed the present population just how does the Council plan to explain its decision to allow new build on farmland to future generations?

The requirement to create new cabins for tourists to stay overnight in the Ag Res is a thinly veiled attempt to open the area to commercialization, gravely detrimental to the founding concept of the Agricultural Reserve in Montgomery County, Maryland. As such, I ask you to discard ZTA 23-09.

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