

Dear Councilmembers:

I'm writing to express opposition to ZTA 23-09, "Outdoor Incidental Use in the Ag Reserve," which is special interest legislation being rushed through for the benefit of one or two land speculators who are not farmers and have no established experience with agriculture.

Unlike a special exception for a particular use, the ZTA would completely change, irrevocably, the way land is bought, leased, and used in the Ag Reserve. It would drive up prices so that a large majority of real agriculture producers, most of whom lease much of the land they farm, would find land increasingly unaffordable to lease.

The sponsor of this ZTA says we need it to be "competitive with other counties." What are we competing for – their congestion, loss of farmland and greenspace, water shortages, suburban sprawl, concrete, and acceleration of climate change? Once land is taken out of farming it is lost forever. We must stop thinking of farmland as disposable land to be exploited.

The Ag Reserve has been funded for more than forty years by people who bought into its purpose to preserve agriculture, open space and rural character for the benefit of residents Countywide. That investment should not be abandoned for the benefit of a few land speculators. Countless MoCo citizens enjoy the myriad results of the Ag Reserve vision, and now many small farms are beginning to gain a foothold on producing table crops for local food. Please don't add to farmers' challenges by driving up land costs. "Yurts" and cabins for short-term rental are not farming activities, and they will in no way support food production. Calling them "agritourism" does not negate that fact.

There are much better ways to stimulate economic growth, and to address housing needs in the County than to begin to unravel the zoning that protects the Ag Reserve against relentless pressure to develop it.

Let's take a thoughtful, studied approach that uses real data and an actual cost/benefit analysis, with appropriate stakeholders at the table. This process worked well for the Solar ZTA and the Cemetery expansion ZTA in progress. This ZTA needs to be paused and more carefully considered.

Thank you for your consideration,

Melane Kinney Hoffmann

Hidden Ridge Farm