

January 6, 2024

Dear Montgomery County Council Members,

First, I want to thank the Council for its role in creating and ensuring the ongoing existence of the Montgomery County Agricultural Reserve (AR). The AR is the jewel in the crown of this County's many accomplishments. Thanks for the wisdom and forethought that brought protections for the farms and rural beauty of this unique area.

I grew up in a family of dairy farmers in Dickerson, MD before the area was designated an Agricultural Reserve. The Gothic Dairy Barn that hosted the discussion of ZTA 23-09 with Councilmember Gonzalez was part of my grandfather's farm. While I no longer live in the AR, I continue to be a property owner here. I treasure the AR and am grateful for the work of the local advocacy organizations.

I have serious concerns about ZTA 23-09. I'm not sure what problem the proposal is attempting to address. There are numerous opportunities for people to visit, enjoy, and immerse themselves in the AR with ample lodging just outside the Reserve for those wishing to extend their visit. I fear that making changes to the code could result in unintended consequences by opening the door open to further commercialism, especially commercial enterprise not related to agriculture or preservation. We need farms, not lodging for tourists, on rural land. What are the environmental impacts of tourist lodgings?

I think it's meaningful for people to come and experience the AR. It fosters understanding of the importance of agriculture and the beauty and value of open, undeveloped land. To see where and how food is grown, see farm animals, visit wineries, and be involved at the point of harvest at local farm markets and Pick Your Own farms and orchards. The AR offers many immersive festivals and agriculture-related activities. But let farms be farms and let's guide agritourists to the many nearby lodging choices just outside the AR.

I sincerely hope that you carefully consider the possibility that that adoption of ZTA 23-09 could alter the nature of the AR in ways that could change the nature, and complicate the future, of this amazing place.

With Regards,

Nancy Cawley
McLean, VA
Property owner, Dickerson, MD.