

Dear Montgomery County Councilmembers,

I am Nia Nyamweya, founder, owner and operator of Beauty Blooms Farm in Damascus, Maryland. I stand with the Montgomery Countryside Alliance, agricultural groups, community associations, and other stakeholders who have stated clearly and firmly opposition to ZTA 23-09.

My primary concern as a farmer, whose farm began on leased land in the Ag Reserve, is that this ZTA will deepen the systemic inequities that are already too stark. Unaffordable land access, rooted in systemic racism and the racial wealth gap, create today's reality that large landowners outprice and outcompete small-scale farmers. Majority of the small-scale farmers of color in our county lease land instead of own, and daily they overcome challenges of commuting, lack of access to capital for infrastructure and equipment, and pouring resources into property that isn't even their own. We need to prioritize supporting working farms and farmers who are stewarding land to feed our community.

As a life-long Montgomery County resident, and a farmer, I urge you to listen to the farmers that will be most impacted by this ZTA. To pass ZTA 23-09, and allow non-agricultural commercial lodging, therefore increasing the cost of an already unaffordable acreage for purchase, is a choice against young, beginning, women, farmers of color who face land access challenges¹.

This ZTA proposes to change the definition of agriculture in the County's zoning code to include commercial lodging, declaring the structures as accessory to agriculture. **The overnight facilities are not related to agricultural production.**

Farmland once lost is lost forever, we rely on our public servants to be forward looking when it comes to protection of finite resources. Balanced agritourism policy that protects the very farms people want to visit is worth the care and attention to get it right. This ZTA is has been the wrong approach from the start and needs to be withdrawn.

Please listen to the farmers most impacted from these policy decisions and work to withdraw this ZTA.



Thank you,
Nia Nyamweya
Founder & Farm Manager
Beauty Blooms Farm

¹ <https://www.youngfarmers.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/NationalSurveyReport22-1.pdf>