

"Representing the Agricultural Producers of Montgomery County"

January 18, 2024

The Honorable Andrew Friedson, President
Montgomery County Council
100 Maryland Avenue
Rockville, MD 20850

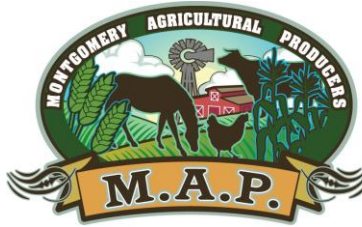
Re: ZTA 23-09, Incidental Outdoor Stays

Council President Friedson:

Forty-four years ago, our county council and fellow citizens had the vision of establishing The Agricultural Reserve, ensuring the preservation and the future of farming in our county. This was accomplished through creative zoning that has stood the test of time. Certainly, it has not come without challenges. However, collectively we have been able to persevere and protect this Nationally recognized program called The Ag Reserve. The major goal was to ensure that development would be limited only to structures that directly supported agriculture.

The importance of preservation of land for agricultural purposes is evidenced by our County and State investing tens of millions of dollars over the years in easements on farmland to continue this protection into the future. I had the honor and pleasure of serving for 12 years on the APAB board and approving many of these easements that will keep this land in agricultural production in perpetuity. I currently serve on the Maryland Rural Legacy Committee that advises the Rural Legacy Board on their state-wide easement program. Last year alone, 34 million dollars in easements for farmland and open space were approved throughout the state. Other programs such as the TDR, BLT, MALPF, and MET are investing in this protection as well. Adding more structures, as this ZTA suggests, that aren't truly part of an agricultural operation contradicts the intent of these programs.

Let's not forget that during our most recent crisis with the COVID-19 Pandemic, our Ag community stepped up and increased production. They worked closely with the food banks in our county to ensure that citizens who were in need had food on their table that was locally grown and quickly delivered. Without the vision of the reserve of 44 years ago, we may not have had the farmers today who were able to provide the food and fiber needed during this crisis. We must ensure they'll be here in the future.



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The structures this ZTA proposes are lodgings, not accessories to farming. We must be wise to ask the question “When is an accessory to an accessory crossing the line and conflicting with the intent of the primary function of farming?” Our farmers have made large capital investments in equipment and infrastructure. The ag community does not need, nor are we asking for, hotels or structures for overnight stays. These lodgings belong under [Chapter 54 of the code which addresses Transient Lodging Facilities](#) where Bed and Breakfasts or Country Inns are found in the code. They are not an accessory to farming.

In closing, I would like to draw your attention to the fact that during this review process MAP, MCFB, MCA, and SCA have collectively asked for this ZTA to be withdrawn. The fact that we are unified in this position should speak volumes to you and your associates that we stand united and strong in our convictions against this ZTA.

We ask for unfavorable consideration of this ZTA and would suggest that all council members encourage it's withdraw.

Sincerely

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Director Montgomery Ag Producers
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