

Kirk Mettam and Lisa Couturier

To: The Montgomery County Council

Re: Testimony in Opposition to ZTA 23-09

Good Evening:

My wife and I moved out to the Agricultural Reserve of Montgomery County over 15 years ago. We strongly support the concept of preserving viable farmland for agriculture in proximity of our Nation's Capitol, for reasons of both sustainability and security for the future of our Nation. The Agricultural Reserve should be applauded for its forward looking insight into the challenges we face in this country and protected as such. Aside from preserving farmland for viable agriculture, now and well into the future, the Ag Reserve has also proven its value in providing a higher quality of life for the county residents. Our County goes to great lengths to support the nationally renowned Ag Reserve for the primary purpose of Agriculture while balancing against the threats of development and the ongoing needs of the county residences. However, the proposed ZTA 23-09 is a direct threat to decades of effort to maintain this unique and important land use zoning. It is both short sighted and lacks the rigorous effort to allow special uses in a way that will protect the Ag reserve. The threats result from abuses by profit driven developer and investors seeking short term gains, and the unintended consequences of increased pressure on our farmers to compete with the increased value of land once these abuses are reflected in the market value of land.

This ZTA would allow motel-style units on land most anywhere in the Ag Reserve at the discretion of the individual landowner without consideration of the larger impact on the Ag Reserve. When developers or Venture Capitalists can buy up land in the Ag Reserve for commercial lodging operations, by falsely calling it an accessory, local rural roads will be subject to traffic they are not prepared for, weekend recreational cyclists will crowd off the roads, and the landscape will become dotted with 'temporary' structures that will remain as an eyesore for decades to come while robbing the Ag Reserve of the land it intended to preserve for farming. As noted above, our farmers who are regularly looking to buy or lease land for growing food and fiber will face unreasonable costs and farming will no longer be viable at scale.

As a long-standing member and board member of the national Land Use professional community, I am shocked by the shortsightedness of those county officials who fall in line under pressure from a few wealthy individuals and fail to understand the uniqueness and importance of the Ag reserve to our region and to the nation. It seems that they are now falling in line to support this underdeveloped and shortsighted ZTA. This rushed ZTA shortchanges the very people this zone is was meant for.

We stand with farmers. Please withdraw this ZTA.

Sincerely,

Kirk Mettam and Lisa Couturier