



January 12, 2024

Montgomery County Council
Stella Warner Council Office Building
100 Maryland Ave.
Rockville, MD 20850

Zoning Text Amendment 23-09 - Hearing Date: January 16th, 2024

Dear Montgomery County Council,

The Montgomery County Food Council (Food Council) appreciates the opportunity to provide testimony to the County Council on Zoning Text Amendment (ZTA) 23-09 Farming - Incidental Outdoor Stays. As currently written, the Food Council recommends more research and outreach should be completed to inform this important opportunity for our County.

The Food Council recognizes the challenges and opportunities for improving the economics of farming for small, diversified farmers in our Agricultural Reserve. Our recent policy priorities have included increasing food security, increasing local food and beverage procurement, and increasing equitable and affordable access to land for local food production. We believe additional information is needed to better understand how this proposed legislation might impact each of these priorities.

Agritourism has the potential to benefit our County by creating new revenue streams for farmers, increasing access to the Agricultural Reserve, and increasing economic activity in the surrounding areas. However, additional targeted outreach should be completed to understand a) how this legislation would impact farming and food production opportunities for existing and prospective food farmers, b) how this proposed ZTA aligns with Montgomery County's goals for food system resilience and racial equity, and c) the impacts to land affordability and preservation for future food production in a time of drastic changes to our climate.

According to the Office of Legislative Oversight Racial Equity and Social Justice review, this ZTA will not create more equitable opportunities for land access in an historically inequitable part of our County. Given the continuing impact of these inequities, we believe any changes should prioritize improvements to racial and social justice.

Before ZTA 23-09 is considered further, the Food Council recommends the following:

- Wider consultation with farmers and other current and potential Agricultural (Ag) Reserve stakeholders to understand the potential impact of changes, and how to best implement agritourism
- Clarify language within the ZTA to better understand the scope and limits of the proposed incidental farm stays, specifically relating to farming as a principal use of the property



- Study the impact on land affordability and preservation in the Ag Reserve, and how the ZTA can increase access to this County asset for all residents

The Food Council looks forward to continuing to work together with Montgomery County Council to enhance the utility of the Agricultural Reserve for all County residents. Thank you again for the opportunity to provide testimony.

The Montgomery County Food Council is a nonprofit organization that serves as the primary connection point for businesses, nonprofits, government agencies, and residents around food system issues in our County. We bring together over 2,000 local and regional partners in community-wide education, advocacy, and capacity building initiatives. Our work cultivates a more resilient, sustainable, and equitable local food system by enhancing food access for the over 100,000 at risk for hunger, expanding food education opportunities for all residents, supporting our County's farms and food and beverage businesses, and addressing the impact of local food production, distribution, consumption and recycling on our natural resources

For more information, please contact Massa Cressall, Interim Executive Director, at the email and phone number below.

