



AGRICULTURAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE

July 5, 2023

Evan Glass, President
Montgomery County Council
100 Maryland Avenue
Rockville, MD 20850

Dear Council President Glass: Rustic Roads Bill 30-23

The Agricultural Advisory Committee (the “AAC”) has carefully followed and appreciates the significant amount of time that the planning staff and board have put into the new Rustic Roads Advisory Functional Master Plan. As an important source of food products and other economic benefits to Montgomery County, our farmers can be dramatically impacted by this Plan. Therefore, we think it’s important that the new plan is precise and clear. Doing so ensures that its execution follows its intent.

The AAC recommends that the Montgomery County Council include the following changes in the final bill:

49-80 (a) (1-5) Rustic Roads Advisory Committee membership

We support the increase in the number of committee members from seven to nine. We are also encouraged to see the addition of one member with an understanding of roadway engineering, as unburdened access to roads is crucial to moving farm products and customers safely and efficiently.

We recommend the following to facilitate a crystal-clear understanding of each appointment type and ensure equitable representation among the various constituencies.

- (1) Change Lines 26 – 28 to read as follows: Three members who operate commercial farmland earning 50 percent or more of their income from direct involvement in commodity farming.

Commercial commodity farmers are managing a clear majority of the total tillable acres in Montgomery County. These commodity farmers are most impacted by rustic roads



and, therefore, should have clear and meaningful representation on the Committee. To



produce their crops, equipment such as large combines must be moved to and from the approximately 35,000 acres of land producing various grains (such as corn, wheat, soybeans, sorghum, barley, and turf) in Montgomery County without damaging expensive equipment or incurring lengthy detours due to road conditions arising from a “rustic road” designation. In the past, both the designation of

the large number of rustic roads as well as the maintenance practices associated with them has placed a significant burden on the farmers in Montgomery County as well as the residents who live on those roads.

- (5) Item 5, which begins at Line 40, is overly broad. The committee should reflect the breath and diversity of the users of rustic roads by a clearer segmentation of user types. To do so, we recommend two changes.

First, change the first sentence to “two at-large members who frequently use rustic roads”

To simply state “other users of rustic roads” is much broader than the examples that are given thereafter. The Planning Board implied that the operative term here is regularity of use as they included in in their last sentence. This change better institutionalizes that intent by bringing that language to the first sentence.

Second, add a number six

- (6) which reads “One member actively engaged in either table crop farming or agritourism”.

Both table crop farming and agritourism businesses offer strong economic development opportunities and draw more people into and expand awareness of the importance of agriculture and the beauty of rustic roads in Montgomery County. Economic development is an important consideration in any comprehensive plan and this rapidly growing segment of the market should be represented on the committee. This also is a grouping which can serve the county’s goals of equity and inclusion. By ensuring that these groups are represented, the committee will better reflect the growing diversification of economic development in the County and users of our more rural roadways.

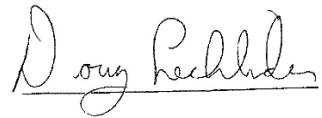
49-80 (e) Rustic Roads Advisory Committee Duties

The AAC does not support the addition of more duties to the Committee at this time. The committee should focus its valuable volunteer time on expanding the awareness of County residents to the existence of the 99 roads currently in the program as well as working with the agricultural community and local residents to improve working relationships. Such time could be

well spent working through the conflicts of the Rustic Roads program with the legislative intent of the Agricultural Reserve-AR zone where agricultural operations are permitted at all times.

In order to promote successful farming in Montgomery County, we must create an environment where the farmers' concerns are addressed, and the rural and rustic roads are safe for the movement of large farm equipment. The changes that we are referring to above will serve to promote such an environment.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Doug Lechliden". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above a thin horizontal line.

Doug Lechliden, Chairman

Cc: Marc Elrich, County Executive